

A SERIAL TALE COMMENCES IN THIS NUMBER.

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"HI, LITTLE GIRL! COME HERE, I WANT YOU!" THE STRANGER SHOUTED.

BROWN EYES AND BLUE.

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CHAPTER L

"Our life is all a play, composed to please,
We have our exits and entrances;
The first act shows the simple country maid,
Harmless and young—"

"Celia Lanchester, you are a baby!"
Sitting on the river bank, my elbows firmly
fixed on my knees, and chin supported by my
clasped hands, gazing Narcissus-like, without his
extraordinary vanity, however, at my own image
reflected not too flatteringly by any means in
the swiftly moving water beneath where I rest, I
meditatively give vent to the above soliloquy.

I always make a rule of being completely
honest with myself, and it is the bare unvar-
nished truth which I utter so complacently.
Nothing but a big girl-baby, though I did say
week, sorry enough to part with what, indeed,

has been inexpressibly pleasant and joyous to
me.

It is a fact, patent to all and everyone who is
lucky or unlucky enough to be in my company
for twelve hours at a stretch. I am blessed and
cursed too—I know not care not which—with a
childish face and appearance, which harmonises
with my childish heart and soul, rendering my
nineteen years null and void, as it were; and the
threshold of womanhood still looming far ahead
of me, instead of being, in truth, very close at
hand.

It is a great habit of mine to thus apostro-
phise myself—to command, exhort, entreat,
command, or scold, as I think occasion neces-
sitates.

A habit born of a solitude which I love;
when alone I roam hither and thither at will,
with only glorious, bounteous Nature for a com-
panion.

For want of a clacking tongue to perform the
onorous office of mentor I undertake the task my-
self, and try to discharge it honourably.

Lest you should find fault with my judgment
on the matter of my still being an unconscious
grown-up baby, and regard it as baseless, I will
give you my reasons, then pronounce sentence if
you choose.

Of course there is no real harm in being a
baby, for all humanity begin their upward crawl
in this stage of existence in like manner. Solon
himself wore long clothes once on a time, and
his tiny pate was as bald as the wisest baby's
could be, but he began early to put away his
"childish things," and showed his wisdom in so
doing.

For my reasons, then. Firstly, I am still
fond of bread-and-milk. Prudence makes me a
howful every morning for breakfast.

Secondly, I still find exuberant pleasure in
riding on the top of a wagon-load of hay as it
jolts home along the country road to be stacked
in the hay-yard, where the huge ricks stand
through the winter for use.

Again, I love to get up some early fresh
autumn dawn, when the dew still hangs heavy

on field and flower, and the spider's web glistens like some diamond-strown bangle in the sun, while the birds carol their matins, and Nature is only yet but half-awake, to gather the pink-hued mushrooms, which have started up from their mother-earth during her sleep in the night; and bring them back to Prudence for her ketchup-making; or later on the autumn day, when the noon has come, and dried up heaven's tears of the early dawn, with tin-can in hand to go a-blackberrying like any other village maid.

But the thing my soul most delights in, the crowning glory of all these Arcadian charms, is to wander over the meadows on some hot summer day, to the river-side, and bare-footed, wade ankle-deep in the shallows, when the stream runs clear and sparkling, over weed and water-moss, and where beds of tender green water-cress sing, "Come, gather me, Celia."

It is with this fixed and entrancing purpose that I have wended my way hither to-day, which is all that a true loyal-hearted summer day can be.

Hot, still, drowsily mellow air, rich, perfume-scented June, when the very sound of rippling, swirling water brings a sense of bliss and calm fascination which other months know not, though they in their turn bring joys belonging to themselves alone. Where is the heart so hardened, the senses so dulled as to fail in counting the rushing dancing river broadening here and there in deep dark pools, where the fish lurk and where tree shadows wave over and lengthen, in pell-mell depths, as some of Dame Nature's sweetest handiwork?

Born and reared in the country, this to me is an earthly paradise.

I have come equipped and garmented for my water-cressing expedition. One does not don one's brightest and best in the matter of garments for these sort of occasions, and I will not deny to you that my toilette is of the seedy, decidedly so. A casual passer-by, seeing my labour, would certainly not take me for other than I seem—namely, water-cress gatherer, but then, mind you, we have no casual passers-by in Marling, east or west. We do not indulge in stray humanity, and Marling rarely sees fresh faces within its Arcadian precincts, hence as far as that goes I am secure. Not that I really care one brass farthing if all Marling came to view me as a natural curiosity, for do they not all know "Miss Celia," and think she, being a Lascelles, cannot do wrong. It would make no difference in their estimate of me whether I went about in monkish sackcloth and ashes.

Anyway, knowing that in all human probability the finish of my water-cressing will find my robe a limp, moist rag of a thing at best, I have donned an old—I may say, a very old cotton gown.

Last summer it possessed a claim to respectability, for it had a delicate pink tracery over it. This year that has gone, frequent washing has made it indistinct. It has a very faded gentility about it now, but good enough for its present use.

Again, as to headgear. Of the bucolic—most bucolic. Literally a country, drawn cotton sunbonnet, such as all the village feminines of Marling wear. Clean and stiff, and starched as you please, but a dear old country sun-bonnet, all the same. Cool and shady, and in my idea eminently appropriate.

Aunt Rachel wages war against my passion for the aforesaid cotton bonnets. Miss Lascelles of Gable End had no business to go about in these "common" things; but tell me, what use is feather, lace, and flower here? Give me my white cotton shade, that is all I want, and all I mean to have in my country roambings.

A great belt of trees and tangled under-growth flanks the opposite bank of the river, whose branches bend over and shade the running water, flowing past.

From this leafy shelter comes every now and then the sound of the tapping woodpecker at work for his meal, and the gentle coo of the wood-pigeon. Sometimes a jay will give one jarring screech and then be quiet after wakening the echoes.

Having seen enough of myself in the mirror—

ing water, and called myself baby, I leisurely take off my stockings and canvas shoes—also suitable to the occasion, and pinning up my skirt over a holland petticoat—a la fishwife, I wade into the cool shallow side of the stream, basket in hand. The water just reaches my ankles, and within arm's reach the bed of water-cress rears its little green sprigs temptingly.

I select the tenderest and youngest heads, picking surely and slowly, until my basket, which is a fair-sized one, is nearly full. I pick, too, a few wan, yellow lillies for home decoration, and am deeply engrossed in my delightful operations, when I am suddenly aroused from my oblivion of all surrounding objects by hearing a voice, evidently not far off, calling out, loudly,—"Hi, Little girl!"

Now "Hi, little girl!" might mean anybody, supposing others besides myself being present. It can hardly mean me, I should imagine. However, I raise my head, which has been hitherto persistently regarding the water-cress at my feet, and look carefully about me. Then, to my surprise, I see what has hitherto escaped my notice.

About fifty yards further on the bank, under the shade of a gnarled old hawthorn, which has seen many a year come and go, on this side of the river, where I know is a deep pool full of little perch and roach, and such small deer, stands a man, fishing-rod in hand, evidently bent on hooking some of those same perch and roach. Doubtless the owner of the voice, for he is the only mortal within sight.

"Hi, Little girl! Come here, I want you," he shouted again, seeing my head turned his way, though I still stand by my watercress bed in the river.

Then I clearly understand that by "Hi, little girl!" he does mean me. Shall I go, or simply take no notice and go on with my own toil? If he wants me he can come to me, I wonder what he does want?

While I am mentally undecided what to do the owner of the voice, who is clearly of an impatient turn of mind, calls loudly again, beckoning this time.

"Come here, I want to speak to you."

I think I'll go. He may have got a fishhook in his finger, or something of that sort. I step on to the bank quickly, draw on my stockings and shoes, and with basket in hand I move towards him.

As I near him he says loudly,—

"Would you like to earn sixpence, Little girl?"

For a second I stare amazed at him. Earn sixpence! I, Celia Lascelles, earn sixpence of a strange man! Good heavens! no, I do not think I should, to answer plainly. What possesses him to ask such an extraordinary question? Can he be mad? and yet he looks sane enough. There is no "fine frenzy rolling" in his clear brown eyes, which regard me amusedly as he goes on,—

"Why you stare as if you had never even heard of a sixpence, much less seen it and called it your own. But you need not look so astonished, for I really mean what I say. If you like you shall earn a silver sixpence for yourself. Come now, what do you say? You'll earn it in less time than you would plucking and selling water-cresses."

He stands busily fitting together the joints of his fishing-rod as he makes his agreeable proposal for my increasing my weekly allowance of pocket-money.

He is evidently in earnest. I wonder what he wants done?

"Haven't you made up your mind yet, Little girl?" smiling. "You're a long time about it, or is it the amount which dazzles your mental vision and renders speech impossible at present? I had no idea sixpences were so scarce in Marling as they seem to be," still busy with the rod.

I am just on the verge of declining the professed honourarium at any price; that he is under a mistaken impression with regard to me, but I shall, however, be pleased to be of any service to him that I can, when my eye falls on my basket of watercresses.

Like a flash of lightning inspiration comes to me. Of course he does not know who or what I

am. To him I am nothing but a village watercress gatherer.

What fun not to undeceive him! I have a great mind not to . . . I won't.

In the next second I have put on an air of bucolic stupidity and with a dawning smile, as if I had then, and only then, recognised the munificence of his offer and intended closing with what was so obviously to my advantage. I fish out slowly in the real true and particular Norfolk vernacular,—

"What's to do, master?"

By this time I mean to infer that I should be glad to hear at his leisure what he required done in exchange for his solid coin of the realm.

I feel that I have been perfectly successful in my country speech. The accent certainly was undeniable. Do I not know it by heart? Has it not sounded in my ears ever since I could hear anything at all? Yes, I experience with almost a feeling akin to pride, that I have been eminently true to nature and Norfolkian Lingus as he says.

"Ah! little girl, so you have really made up your mind at last whether you will earn this sixpence or not? Well, perhaps you are right. It's never wise to decide on things too much in a hurry. I find I've left my box of bait at home. Now, having come all the way here, I don't feel inclined to go back for it. Now if you can run to the village or nearest cottage—perhaps you live near—and bring me some, the silver sixpence shall be yours. You must make as much haste as you possibly can, because I'm at a standstill until I get some bait. What do you say now?"

I nod slowly twice, still with the bucolic grin firmly fixed on my face.

"You agree, then?"

I nod again, thinking that under the existing circumstances it will perhaps be wise to say as few words as possible.

"Well, scamper off as fast as you can. The quicker you are the sooner you'll earn your money, and the better I shall be pleased. Mind you bring those little bright red worms, those fat grey-coloured ones are no use for fishing; the fish don't see them, or won't bite at them. You can leave your basket of watercress here until you come back, that will ensure your coming, at any rate. Now then, up and away," laying his rod against the trunk of the hawthorn and getting out a case of hooks of several sizes, in order to select one of the right dimensions.

There is a free and easy style in his manner of addressing me which, as I am not used to, goes rather against the grain. This, however, is not his fault, for he imagines himself parleying to a village maiden of low degree, and naturally indulges in unconventional speech—the manner of superiority addressing inferiority.

Having brought the situation on myself with that one query of mine, "What's to do, master?" in best Norfolkshire, I ought not and will not complain.

I do not "scamper off" as he desires, but move away briskly along the bank towards Gable End, and am soon out of the angler's sight.

As I go I think over the last ten minutes or quarter of an hour, from the moment of my hearing that "Hi, little girl!" which roused me from my water-cressing, until now; and so thinking, am fain to indulge in much inward merriment.

The whole affair is capital, splendid, delicious, I say to myself. Celia Lascelles taken for a cress-gatherer, bidde to "scamper off" and procure "nice red worms" for bait, to be paid sixpence for her trouble. It is farcical to the last degree.

Oh! you dear old cotton gown and sun-bonnet, what do I not owe you! Fine feathers do, indeed, make fine birds, and vice versa. Well, for the nonce, I am an actress, and behave accordingly.

I go round by the stable entrance on reaching Gable End, for two reasons—firstly, I don't want to meet either aunt or Michael just now, for they would hinder me from making haste, as I was desired by my employer at the riverside, and would probably keep me talking or comic back with me, which, for obvious reasons, would never

do; secondly, I am anxious to get hold of Peter, the gardener's boy, probably eating his mid-day meal in an outhouse, for it is twelve o'clock, and make him promptly dig the coveted "nice red worms."

Yes, as I suspected, Peter, aged twelve, is munching bread and onions with commendable gusto on a bundle of straw in a potting shed.

As soon, however, as I express my wish, Peter, spade in hand, forsakes his onions, and goes to work with hearty good will, I watching him. In less than five minutes Peter has amassed a goodly number, for he knows exactly what I want, and their native haunts.

Then in ten minutes more I am again on my return journey, with the tin of writhing, slippery worms in one dreadful moving mass seemingly inextricable. I only hope he won't want me to take them out, because that business I shall completely and finally decline, at the risk of my sixpence even.

Arriving in haste at the hawthorn, I find the angler awaiting my return with admirable fortitude, lying full length in the long, soft grass, smoking a cigarette. He springs up with anxiety on seeing me tin in hand, and throwing away the nearly finished cigarette, takes the tin from me, saying as he does so,—

"That's right. You are a good girl. How quick you've been. I hardly thought you could be back just yet. I suppose you live somewhere not very far off? Yes"—looking into the tin and prodding up the worms with a little twig—"these are just what I wanted. I consider you've earned your money very well indeed. I expect you don't earn much more than that a day at cross-selling, do you?" giving the worms a good shake up to make them disintegrate themselves if possible.

"Now," I ejaculate, with the buccolic grin, giving it in pure lingo, and shaking my head aside its sun-bonnet.

"There," he says, putting down the tin on the grass, and taking a coin out of his waistcoat pocket, balancing it on the end of his right forefinger, "there is your well-earned guerdon. I've looked over all my expences, and picked out the newest and brightest for you. Take it; it is yours, lawfully earned."

He holds it towards me, and I take it. There is nothing else to be done, that I can see. Of course I shall not eventually keep it, only just now, it really is such fun. I must see the end of my quaint little farce. Yes, I, Celia Lacoules, take this man's sixpence, and put it in my pocket, without one single word of dissent.

"Well, what do you say for it, my village Phyllis? Isn't it worth a thank you, or don't they take the extra twopence for manners at Marling School?" unwinding the line, which has got a little entangled in the hawthorn branches overhead, and speaking patronisingly while he thus occupies himself.

Now is my opportunity to return the money, off my buccolic disguise, and avow my deception, if it so pleases me.

Doubtless, I am in one of my "contrary" moods, for the idea does not please me. For the life of me I feel I must go on acting: I may never, never have such an opportunity again of distinguishing myself as an actress. The novelty is charming.

No, I will see the end of it, come what may. Anyway, I can conscientiously assert there is no harm in it; so, dropping a good country curtesy, I mutter,—

"Thank's kindly, master."

Then, picking up my basket of watercresses and hanging it on my arm, I prepare to move away.

By this time he has cleared his rod and line from the tree, and is busily engaged in baiting the hook with a specially red worm, chosen from the horrid mass. Seeing my intentions, he calls out,—

"Don't go yet. I want you to disentangle this cord for me. I see it's got in an awful muddle. You'll have to undo the knots first. Your girl's fingers will be better able to do it than mine. You'd better sit under the tree in the shade while you're doing it; it's hot

in the sun. I expect it will be a work of patience."

He hands me a frightful tangle of thin line cord to unravel as he speaks. I suppose there's no help for it now, I must do as he wishes; so, laying down the basket again, I take it from him, sit down on the moss-grown bank under the hawthorn, and silently commence my task.

It rather strikes me as I eye it that he spoke truly when he said it was a work of patience. Only a man's impatience could possibly have got it in this state.

This unravelling gives me a splendid opportunity of observing the angler more closely as he stands about three yards off on the extreme verge of the bank, holding his rod in mid-stream, and calmly watching the little orange-coloured float with the tenacity and plaid delight of a true disciple of Isaac Walton.

My careful survey satisfies me upon one point, at least that he is a gentleman. A man born and bred well. The cut of his Norfolk jacket, the pose of his head, the general *je ne sais quoi*, which marks and emphasises breeding. As to looks, he did not at the very first outset strike me as being a specially handsome masculine. Indeed, I was, I think, too flattered with the novelty of the situation to think much as to whether he was an Apollo Belvedere or not. It is only now my scrutiny decides me that though not absolutely an Apollo Belvedere, he is a male biped of a goodly appearance. A mortal pleasant to look upon. I hereunder will set forth the items of his charms.

He is tall—not too tall, however, that is, not "gate-posty" or drawn out lengthways like fine wire. Good broad shoulders, not of herculean build, but properly proportionate. Bright brown, smiling eyes that seem to look you through as they meet yours, should you happen to be gazing in that direction. A brown moustache not very dark hides the mouth, which should be merry too, I am sure, could one see the lips. I like him, yes; though he has mistaken me for a village cross-girl, and given me sixpence for fishing bait.

I should like to know who he is, where he comes from, what his name is—in fact, all about him. But in my character of village "mawther"—another true and particular Norfolk term—it would not be wise to manifest too great a curiosity. Besides, I don't know how far I might have to sustain an animated conversation in the vernacular, which even my thorough knowledge of might fail me at last.

"And, so, you're a water-cress gatherer!" queries the angler, giving his rod a tremendous flourish in the air, and letting it drop with a swish back into the stream.

I do not contradict him for obvious reasons; moreover, in a certain sense, I could not truthfully say I wasn't. Have I not a basketful of the little water weed lying by my side? So I return, stolidly.

"Aye, master!" and nod my sun-bonnet.

"I suppose you don't find it an ever and above profitable business, on the whole?" he goes on, jokingly, "couldn't make much of a fortune at it. Now, as a rule, taking all in all, on an average about how much do you make a day?" watching my fingers fiddle-faddling with the mass of cord lying in my lap.

Now what on earth shall I say!—for, of course, I must say something. I have not the very remotest notion how much cross-gatherers do earn a day; however, with a sudden inspiration I rejoin, still stolidly,—

"We a'most eat 'em all," meaning to imply, therefore, that the family consumption precludes the "very hard cash" side of the business.

"Ah! nice wholesome things too. A green-meat diet which, though wanting in nourishment, enjoys the enviable reputation for being good for the liver. You look healthy enough on it, at any rate. A first-rate specimen of the efficacy of watercress," and so enunciating he scans me a little closer, with more observation than he has hitherto manifested. "I declare the sight of your peach-bloom cheeks makes me tempted to try the diet myself. Will you guarantee a fresh supply every day if I take to greenmeat for the

next few months?" turning his gaze again to the orange-coloured float, which as yet shows an insolent determination not to bob under with a little fish on the hook.

"Aye, master, if you like," smiling up at him.

The brown eyes turn to me again, then he says placidly, without any undue haste or manifest intention of complimenting,—

"What blue eyes you have—regular obsidian blue. Where did you get them from—father or mother?"

"Mother," I answer, laconically, not inclined to go into details.

"Must have been a handsome woman, I should think," still contemplatively.

"Aye, mother were right handsome," I affirm, for I remember hearing that my mother was counted a beauty in her day.

"And you take after her!"

"Aye, I suppose so. I don't know," struggling with a particularly obstinate knot which bids fair to conquer even my determination.

"Well, you are a pretty child; at least, I am not sure you are such a child as you look, now I see you closer. How old are you?"

Shall I tell him my real age? Why not! It cannot matter.

"I wor' nineteen a week agone," I say, in broadest dialect.

"Nineteen!" in tones of astonishment. "I took you for about fourteen or fifteen—sixteen at most. I can tell you one thing, London belles would give a good deal to learn your recipe for keeping youthful looks. I don't think even the greenmeat diet could do all that. By George! I do believe that was a bite at last," speaking a little more excitedly; "didn't you see the float go under? No, confound it, it's come up again. The fish is off, if it was ever on. It's my opinion these fish are too downy to be caught. I'll try a fresh worm, and see what that will do."

Taking his rod out of the water, he examines the hook. True enough, a bit of that "nice red worm" is missing, but the biter is not hit in turn.

By this time I have finally succeeded in undoing the last knot. Winding the cord up into a ball, I get up on my feet and hold it out to him.

"I must go now," I say, standing by his side.

"Dinner time, I suppose. It must be getting on for one, I am sure. If you're hungry there's a sandwich in that bag that you can have if you like. A labourer is worthy of his hire."

I am on the brink of affirming that I don't like. A sandwich is always a nauseous composition of bread, butter, and meat, to me. It is an edible I detest; but if I say so it will sound very arrogant on my part to refuse such a dainty.

To one in my position meat in any shape or form would be considered the greatest dainty, the usual meal being potato or onion dumpling varled with a square inch of fat pork.

"Now, I thank you, master," making him a bob-curtsey, and then, taking up my basket, prepare to depart.

"Good-day, and right thank you for the sixpence!" I add, a lingering smile on my face as I say it.

"Do you come here every day?" he queries rather abruptly, ere I make my exit.

I shake my head dubiously.

"Now," I mutter.

"Are you coming to gather watercresses tomorrow?" he asks again, giving the rod a jerk in the water, hoping to land a fish.

I shake my head once more.

Not to-morrow or the next day, or the next, or, in fact, any day that I know of. Oh, pleaser! I have played out my little rôle. No morrow will find me here, at least I do not think so. Certainly not under existing circumstances.

"I think I'd come if I were you," he goes on, almost coaxingly. "I am sure to want something or other done, and then you can earn another sixpence. Besides, I want to hear where's the best fishing along the river, and a whole lot of things about Marling. I'll tell them to put me up some bread and butter for my luncheon, and then you can pick the water-cress

and help to eat it. I shouldn't know which was proper to gather. I think now you'll come."

I look up at him quickly with the full and firm intention of declining, giving some small excuse for not doing so, but when I meet those clear brown eyes, smiling at me as much as to say, "de come," the "naw" sticks in my throat, and remains for ever unuttered. My lips part in a smile, as I say,—

"Perhaps I'll come, master," added as an afterthought, for somehow the lingo lapsed a little from its bacolic form in my last sentence. "Good-day."

"Mind you do, Blue Eyes," he calls out as I move away; "remember, I shall expect you to keep your word. I've quite a desire to begin my greenment diet already, so mind you do. Good-day."

It strikes one o'clock, by Marlins church clock, as I reach the orchard gate, through which I pass, and so round a side way to the dairy entrance, and then through into Prue's red-bricked kitchen. Her domain completely.

Here I find her keeping guard over a dish of baked batter pudding and gravy, which will presently be carried in for the mid-day meal.

The pride and glory of old Prue's heart is a baked batter pudding. Light as a *rouffle*, crisp and brown, it is her *chef d'œuvre*.

Placing the basket on the side-table, I sink on to the cushioned, oaken settle, remnant of a by-gone time, and where Prue nods through the long winter evenings, on one side of the big, open chimney, and burst out laughing long and loudly.

Prudence surveys me with rather a frightened stare.

"Lawks, Miss Celia, whatever is it?" she inquires, regarding me and the batter pudding at the same time.

"Oh, Prue! let me have my laugh out. I have been dying to laugh like this for an hour past, and didn't dare. Tell me, did you ever earn a sixpence?"

"Adone now, Miss Celia, you're making game. Of course I have; earned hundreds of 'em in my life. You know that."

"Ah! but I don't mean hundreds. I mean one single, little, silver sixpence, like this," taking it out of my pocket, and holding it up to the light.

"Lawks, Miss Celia, you will have your joke. There's the luncheon bell going, and the pudding 'll be cold, if you don't make haste. Come, there's a dearie, run upstairs and take your hat off," she says, with all the freedom of an old servant. Prue has dangled me many a time in her arms; she knew dear old Gable End long, long before I was even dreamt about.

I do run upstairs to my room, slip off the limp, cotton gown, and don another dress. Then, before going down, I place the sixpence in the palm of my hand, and gaze steadfastly at it.

The very first, and only, piece of money I have ever earned in all my nineteen years. I ought, by rights, to put it in a glass case on a little crimson-velvet cushion, as a curiosity; or, better still, have a hole bored in it, and wear it as a charm for good luck. I hope it will bring me good luck. At any rate, I consider I earned it fairly or perhaps Peter really earned it, because he dug the "nice red worms." I think Peter ought to have it. So he shall—well, no, not this particular sixpence, because I don't care to part with it. He shall have another.

Putting the coin in my drawer for the present, I pass down the polished wood corridor, past a door from whence proceeds a soft, purring voice.

"Celia, sweetest, is that you?"

"Yes, aunt!"

"I was afraid, my own, that you would be late for luncheon, for I asked Prudence if you had come in, about ten minutes ago, and she said no."

At this moment the voice reaches the half-open door. Aunt floats out into the dimly-lit corridor, and we go downstairs, past the old family portraits, and jars of *pot pourri*, into the dining-room at Gable End.

The batter pudding, in all its frothy crispness,

rests on the table. I am hungry, very hungry, though I did refuse a sandwich but a short time back.

I wonder what Aunt Rachel would say if she knew my morning's work. Truly it is a droll world; nothing but a vast stage, and we are all players at best, myself least of all very probably.

At any rate I have made a successful *début*.

(To be continued.)

FAIR AND FICKLE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

LIGHTS were flashing from the windows of the Town Hall at Lissington; strains of dance music floated out on the night wind; the air was heavy with the perfume of dying flowers, giving out their sweetest fragrance in the hour of their death. Fountains dripped and played into their marble basins with musical plash; fountains spread their fresh, graceful fronds in every corner, in company with roses, azaleas, camellias, and a host of other exotics; filmy curtains draped window and doorway; yard upon yard of crimson cloth covered the stairs, and the pavement under the awning, down to the kerbstone, where all manner of vehicles—from splendidly-horsed barouches down to shabby frys, with broken-kneed, broken-winded hacks—were depositing loads of gaily-dressed damsels, and magnificently-attired chaperons.

They came in two and threes, and sometimes in battalions of six and seven, and men seemed few and far between—at all events, escorting the dazzlingly-arrayed fair ones. True, the lords of the creation arrived by themselves, mostly on foot; and by-and-by, the regimental drag drove up, and deposited a score or so of laughing Lieutenants, and the junior captains.

The Colonel and the senior officers had already arrived, and were receiving their guests in the first of the handsome suites of rooms which they had secured in which to give their long-promised ball.

The 30th Lancers had been quartered at Lissington six months, but up to the present had hardly entertained the ladies of the neighbourhood at all, contenting themselves with showing hospitality to their male relatives. This was hardly pleasing to the fair part of the community, and by some means or other they managed to let the moving spirits of the regiment know it, the result being a promise to give a ball. This promise was not speedily redeemed, and April was well on before the date was fixed for the second week in May.

All Lissington was disturbed about this military festivity, and each and every lady, whether young or old, rich or poor, pretty or ugly, high-class or low-class, hoped to receive an invitation. It is needless to say that many were disappointed.

The Lancers fancied themselves just a little bit, thought they were the thing, and therefore gave themselves airs, and were exclusive. In issuing their invitations they had patronized three of the aristocracies—beauty, birth, and talent; poor money was left out in the cold. They would not have any purse proud, vulgar snobs at their ball.

Fellows who had risen from nothing, and were hazy in their notions as to the relative uses of a knife and a fork, and doubtful where to put, and where to leave out, their aspirates; who wore white waistcoats, ill-made swallow-tails, baggy trousers, and gloves a good size too large for them; whose womenkind were bold and unabashable, loud as to manners, and loud as to dress, detestable creatures altogether, by no means to be cultivated. No, they would only have the élite at their entertainments—the *crème de la crème*!

Of course a pretty woman, even if her blood were not blue and thick, was a different matter,

or a celebrity who had risen from the ranks of nobodies, and gained fame sufficient to make folk pass over in silence, or forget entirely, the accident of low birth; and several such as these found their way to the Lancers' ball; but actual moneyed snobs were conspicuous by their absence.

So far as numbers and splendour of costume went, the entertainment eclipsed any other ever given at Lissington.

The Duke of Beaumorris was present, with his mother the Dowager Duchess, the Marquis of Galway, an Earl, several Barons and Knights, and Squires, and county gentlemen in any number.

It was an animated scene, varied, rich, weird, grotesque, for all were in fancy dresses, save the givers of the ball, who wore their splendid gold-laced uniforms that made them conspicuous wherever they were, even amid the rainbow-hued costumes of their guests.

A "square" was being danced. One set headed by good Queen Bess, beaded by gallant Francis Drake, white at her right hand stood Sir Walter Raleigh, opposite the Earl of Leicester, and a courtier of her period, while Mary Queen of Scots stood by him, and some ruffed maidens of her court. Another set was composed of Chinese ladies, with gorgeous yellow gowns, and pigtailed mandarins; another of monks, nuns, Salt-lake City fathers, dissenting ministers and quakers, a queen crew; another of the Alcalde of Cordova, with some of the members of his Court; a fourth was composed of Cleopatra, Marc Antony, Julius Caesar, Octavia, and other Roman celebrities; a fifth of courtiers of George II.'s reign in big wigs, white ties, and wide-skirted, brocaded coats; a sixth of Nancy Lee, Black-eyed Susan, Britannia, Venus, Neptune, and sundry British tars.

About the room were various Indians, Vacquerins, Roundheads, Cavaliers, Beefeaters, Oliver Cromwells, shepherds and shepherdesses, a Polar Bear, an ice queen; Winter, with sparkling white robe; Summer, a mass of lovely roses; Spring, arrayed in a snowy gown with garnishing of violets and primroses; Autumn, with corn-crowned head and barley-trimmed skirts. Then there was Charles Surface, swaggering about arm-in-arm with David Garrick, and King Harold talking to a French cook, Nelson to Napoleon, a Zulu to a Matador, and Mars discussing politics with bluff King Hal, while Anne Boleyn chattered gaily to a Roman warrior, and the fair Rosamond discussed artfully to Fra Diavolo, and Diana, with a rustic in smock and thick boots.

When the "square" was finished the dancers broke into knots and groups, and perhaps the most striking group was composed of two ladies dressed in lovely Greek costumes, faithful to the original, and rather décolleté, that showed off their beauty to great advantage; Oliver Cromwell, a fine-looking old man of about sixty-five; a handsome young fellow attired in heliotrope velvet coat, and flowing wig, evidently the Merrie Monarch's costume; a jester in scarlet and yellow, with cap and bells; a Puritan, and one or two men in French court dress.

"Well, what do you think of it all, my grave and sedate friend?" asked Major Chesterfield of Guy Tredennis, who, owing to a severe wound in the chest from an Afghan bullet, had not accompanied the Lancers to England, but had been obliged to remain in India for a further period of six months, and so had only arrived at Lissington the day before; therefore, being a perfect stranger to all in the room, and quite in the dark as to who was who, and what what, all the little petty scandals, and *riakly on dits* that are always floating about in a country town, where time hangs heavy on folks' hands, and Satan still finds mischief for idle hands, &c.

"I think it is very gay and very amusing," returned Captain Tredennis, in his usual slow, easy way, as his eyes wandered from group to group, as though seeking something once seen, and never to be forgotten.

"Is that all the praise you are going to give us, you lazy dog, after all the trouble we have had to get up and perfect this high jink?"

"What more do you want me to say?"

"Well, I hardly expect you to say anything more," acknowledged the Major, with a laugh.

" You are of the *all admirers* class, admiring nothing, surprised at nothing, enjoying nothing—"

" Draw the line there. I enjoy a great many things."

" Really ! Well, you don't show your enjoyment of the many things."

" Not in a boisterous way, I admit ; still that does not prove that I do not take pleasure in certain things."

" True. I will allow that. Only you are grave, and look stern and sad, and—"

And then Major Chesterfield broke off suddenly, and pretended to be interested in some costume, for he remembered he was venturing on delicate ground, and that if Guy Tredennis did look sad and grave there was ample cause why he should.

In his early youth he had been betrothed to a beautiful girl, whom he loved passionately, and who returned his affection with equal ardour. The course of their true love, for a wonder, ran smooth for a while. Everything was satisfactory—settlements, income, friends, prospects. The wedding day drew nigh, the wedding-gown was made, the wedding cake loed, the guests bidden to the feast ; and on the eve of the day Tredennis and his lovely young bride-elect went out for a last stretch across the downs on their thoroughbreds, and the Arab that Mary Claudia rode bolted, frightened by the scream of a child who rolled almost under its hoofs.

Away it went, over hedges and ditches, across fields and plains, and commons, closely followed by Guy, on his mettlesome chestnut. But, though he strained every nerve in that wild, dread ride, he could not overtake the flying grey ; and when he saw him turn aside, and head for the old chalk pit, a yawning, great black gap in the hillside, he knew she was lost. And, before his horror-stricken eyes, he saw the Arab take the leap into the air, and then disappear from sight, carrying his almost senseless burden with him.

When help was brought, they found the horse and rider in a mangled heap at the bottom ; and Guy carried her back to her home, which she was to have left on the morrow a blooming bride, her poor blood-stained head and crushed face resting on his bosom, the arms that were wont to clasp him so tenderly hanging stiffly at her side.

For years after the young man never smiled ; and even after the lapse of sixteen years the horror of it was still with him. And, though he never paraded his grief, nor alluded to it even in the most distant manner, all his brother officers knew that the cloud still hung over him—that he was not quite like they were—and studied him, and were more delicate with him than with others ; never chaffing him about women, or twisting about love affairs, though they rallied him on other subjects, and jested with him, trying to banish the melancholy that devoured him, or he was a general favourite.

Even-tempered, generous, brave, a perfect gentleman in every sense of the word, what wonder that he had few enemies and many friends !

Among the chief of these latter was Major Chesterfield, a man of forty-five summers, who had known Guy since he was a child, and was deeply and truly attached to him, and had been one of his chief counsellors when death had deprived him of his young bride, and always hated himself cordially when he made any allusion to the graveness and melancholy that distinguished his friend from other men.

In the present instance he cast about wildly for something to say that would remove any unpleasant impression his words might have conveyed, and catching sight of the heliotrope velvet coat, plunged eagerly into a conversation about it.

" Good-looking fellow that, isn't he ? "

" Which one ? " asked Tredennis, quietly. " There are a good many nice-looking men here to-night."

" Yes. The fantastic finery transforms grubs into butterflies, doesn't it ? "

" Yes."

" The fellow I mean is young Grandison."

" I was just as wise before. You forget, Claude,

that I am a stranger here, and don't know the Jones and Smiths of Lissington."

" They are not of Lissington proper, and are not of the Smith-Jones class, either. County people—a very good family."

" Then the gentleman has sisters and parents, I presume ? "

" No, my dear fellow. He stands alone in that respect, only having an uncle and a brace of cousins."

" Of which gender ? "

" The feminine."

" Pretty ! "—interrogatively, yet indifferently, while his eyes still wandered round the gay, well-lit room.

" One is lovely. The belle of the place for miles around ! "

" I see. Then your friend is courted on account of his lovely relatives ? "

" Partly. Partly on his own account. He is not half a bad fellow, and has a fine place."

" I see. Gives bachelor dinners—oh ! "

" Yes ; rattling good ones, too. Keeps hunters, that are always at the disposal of friends ; has a good billiard-table, and altogether is not a fellow to snub, when one is quartered in a hole like this ! "

" I see, " said the Captain, again. But you have not yet shown me this *rara avis* in the flesh."

" Well, I can show him to you in a heliotrope coat, " returned Chesterfield, jocosely. " There he is, straight forent ye, as our brethren in the Emerald Isle say."

" Where ? " asked Guy, searching wildly for the coat.

" In that group near the door."

" Cher Claude, there are a dozen groups near the door."

" So there are, of course. I have only eyes for one ! "

" Hard hit by one of the cousins, eh ? "

" Hit, but not hard, at present, " acknowledged the Major, coolly and nonchalantly.

" And now which is your group ? "

" The Oliver Cromwell one."

" Ah ! "

Tredennis uttered but the one word, and then his eyes fastened on the people composing it. Attentively he studied each member. The stately old man, whose stern face did well for a representative of Old Noll ; the handsome, gay Charles the Second, the cynical jester, whose clear-cut features and pale face suited admirably the three-cornered cap, with its nodding bells, and the two men in French court-dress, who had nothing particular about them to attract attention.

His eyes rested longer on the ladies. One was handsome, with beautiful glossy, black hair, and dark fringed grey eyes ; the other was simply lovely.

She was very young, and the bloom of extreme youth was on her cheek, showing in the exquisite wild-rose bloom that tinged it, and in the pearly whiteness of chin and brow. Her hair was of a warm, ruddy, bronze colour, dressed in a small knot, *à la Grec*, while her brows were jet black, and arched over a pair of the bluest of blue eyes ; her mouth was pretty and curved, her features straight and regular, and over all was an expression of innocence and winsomeness that most inevitably charm all beholders.

Apparently it charmed Guy Tredennis, for he looked long and steadily at her, with a new light in his sombre eyes.

" Well, what do you think of him ? " asked Chesterfield at last, after a long pause.

" He is extremely handsome, and has a dashing appearance that, no doubt, makes him a favourite with the fair sex."

" Yes. He never has a lack of partners or admirers."

" I suppose not. And who is Oliver Cromwell ! "

" Mr. Harcourt, of Harcourt Reach."

" A county magnate ! "

" Yes."

" Rolling in riches, of course. Landed estates, and all that kind of thing ! "

" He is very well off now, but his daughter

won't have much. She ought to have been a boy. Harcourt Reach will go to Grandison."

" Why ? What has he to do with Oliver ? "

" He's his nephew, that's all."

" Oh ! I see. And who is the lady next him ? "

" The beauty, you mean ! "

" They are both good-looking, " returned Guy, evasively.

" True. Only Ruby attracts where Violet dazzles."

" And which is which ? "

" The one standing near Harcourt with the chestnut hair is Violet, his daughter ; the other is Ruby Merton, his niece."

" Oh ! Poor relation ! "

" Not exactly, " answered Chesterfield, with just a shade of embarrassment in his manner. " She is not living on his charity. She has a hundred a-year of her own that her mother left her, and the Squire is only too delighted to be able to give his dead sister's only child a home."

" You seem to know all about them, " remarked Tredennis, with a faint smile.

" I know them pretty well. Shall I introduce you ? "

" No, better not, " answered the Captain, shaking his head dubiously.

" Nonsense. You must know all these people sooner or later—the sooner the better."

" Just as you like, " he said, indifferently, following his friend towards the group, of which the brilliant Violet was the centre.

Perhaps it would have been better for his peace of mind if he had adhered to his first determination, and refused to be introduced to this Circe with the innocent smile and bronze tresses.

CHAPTER II.

" HAVE you a dance left, Miss Harcourt ? " inquired Chesterfield, as they reached the group.

" Not one ! " she declared, with a smile, displaying a silvered fan-programme, with every line filled up.

" How unfortunate ! " he exclaimed.

" Why ? " she asked, with a smile, that displayed all her dimples, and a row of even white teeth.

" Because I wanted to introduce you to a friend, who is a first-rate dancer. Reverse to perfection ? "

" Well—you can introduce him."

" But—he wants a dance ! "

" I dare say I can manage to give him one."

" You said just now your card was full ? "

" So it is."

" Then how are you going to manage matters ? "

" Can't you guess ? " with an arch look at him, and a little sweeping gesture of her gloved hand across the programme.

" I see, " with a laugh. " You mean to let him write his name over some other poor fellow's ? "

" Exactly. Unless you like to be generous, and give up yours to him instead ! "

" By no means ! " he returned, quickly. " I stipulate that, if I introduce him, you are not to let my name be effaced from your card."

" Very well."

" My dance is fifteen—a waltz."

" Yes."

" Remember, I shall claim it, and have it under any circumstances."

" Of course. That goes without saying."

" Not always—with you."

" You mean to insinuate— ! " with another arch glance at him.

" That you would not have any scruples about letting my name be scratched if it were to make room for a more favoured partner—a better dancer."

" You are not complimentary to yourself nor to me."

" No. In this case I am simply truthful."

" Really ! But you have not introduced your friend, " hinted Violet, who, having caught a glimpse of Guy's fair, handsome face and blonde moustache, was quite ready to have this new aspirant to favour presented.

" No, let me repair my error now. Guy, allow

me to introduce you. Captain Tredennis—Miss Harcourt." Guy bowed, and proffered a request for a dance.

"I shall be very pleased to give you some," she said, coolly, considering her card was full, with a winsome smile, for on closer examination she more approved of this tall, melancholy, interesting-looking lancer, and was determined to try his paces; yes, and that more than once, too, if she found they accorded with hers.

"Which may I have?" he asked, taking the dainty fan.

"Six, twelve, and eighteen," she returned, with the utmost calmness, seeing that against each names were written in bold letters.

"But," he hesitated, "there are names down already. Does that matter?" feeling the natural diffidence a gentleman would to inscribe his own name over another man's.

"Not the least in the world," she said, serenely. "I gave them conditionally, and have a perfect right to let you have them if I choose."

"In that case I shall be only too happy to have them," and he struck out the names, and wrote his own in levitation letters across them. "There, that is settled!" handing her back the card.

"Yes, and I hope satisfactorily."

"To me—very," he answered, looking at her admiringly, a look which Chesterfield intercepted and wondered at; for for sixteen years he had never seen Guy even glance at a woman with more than the commonest and barest interest.

"I am glad of that. I must confess that it is satisfactory to me, for the owners of those cognomina can't dance a bit."

"Poor fellows!" with great commiseration.

"You pity them from the altitude of your exalted position as an eminent dancer."

"I don't know that I am that," he smiled.

"Do you mean to tell me you are not a good dancer?" she queried, in visible alarm, as she made it a rule never to give a round to a "duffer" in the art of terpsichore.

"It is not for me to praise myself," he answered, assuming an air of mock modesty.

"Certainly not. Only do tell me—can you reverse?"

"Oh, yes; I can reverse," he acknowledged.

"Then you can't be very bad."

"I hope not. I should much prefer to be very good—even sanctimonious."

"Oh, you know I did not mean that!" she explained, with a slight blush.

"Indeed! I couldn't—"

"Guy," interrupted Chesterfield, "if you have not quite filled up your programme, will you let me introduce you to Miss Merton?"

"I shall be delighted," returned Guy readily, though he was hardly well pleased at the interruption, and suffered himself with very good grace to be introduced to Ruby Merton, and asked and obtained dances from her.

When he turned, after a little conversation, he found the ring of men around Violet had closed up, and he was shut out. Not knowing her well enough to push his way through the circle, he simply stood by till the band struck up a waltz, and then the knot gradually melted away, as the members paired off, and he found himself once more alone with the Major.

"Aren't you going to dance this?" queried the latter.

"No, I haven't a partner!"

"Shall I introduce you to one?"

"Thanks; but I prefer looking on just now!"

"Guy, you are getting worse!"

"In what way?"

"Lesser, more inert, more inclined for the *dolce far niente!*"

"Yes, I think I am," he replied, reflectively.

"At any rate, I don't often feel energetic now!"

"No, you don't," agreed his friend, and then as he looked at him, something in that handsome face struck him, and he asked, "Does that wound bother you?"

"Sometimes, a trifle!"

"Painful!"

"Yes, a sharp pain here when it is at all cold," and he laid his hand on his breast, where the Afghan bullet had penetrated.

"You must be careful of yourself, old fellow!"

"Oh, I am careful enough!" he answered, carelessly.

"I don't think you are."

"Why, I haven't danced once as yet to-night, and now have only five engaged!"

"Good boy! And those are—?"

"Miss Harcourt and Miss Merton."

"Well, what do you think of them?"

"I hardly know them well enough yet to form an opinion!"

"And with regard to their looks?"

"They are both charming in that respect!"

"Nothing to choose between them!"

"I hardly meant that! I think Miss Harcourt would dazzle and attract a man, Miss Merton—"

"Miss Merton slowly wins his love and retains it eh?"

"Well, perhaps so! She looks very amiable."

"And she is very amiable. A thoroughly good woman. Does no end of good among the poor."

"And does her cousin assist her?"

"No. Violet is younger. More of a butterfly. A bit of a flirt!"

"Is she?" exclaimed Tredennis, with an echo of regret in his tone.

"I am inclined to think so! She is most lovely, and of course spoiled by admiration, of which she gets no end."

"Is there any particular admirer?"

"I think not, unless it be Grandison, and he, as a cousin, is naturally privileged, and would be with her a good deal."

"Naturally," agreed Guy at once.

"I fancy with Miss Violet all is fish that comes to her net. She is very lively, ready to be amused by anybody. If Tom Smith doesn't turn up she makes herself agreeable to Jim Jones, and turns her blue eyes and her winning smile on him, fascinating him, and amusing herself. Passing the time for both, only with her it is sport, and to 'him' it generally means death, or, at any rate, a partially broken heart, and the blues for a long period, as she manages to make them all fall head over ears in love with her."

"Yes, I should think she could do that. And are you head over ears in love with her?" with a keen glance at the Major.

"Oh, dear no!" laughed Chesterfield, adding, with just a tinge of embarrassment in his manner, "I am more likely to lose my heart to Miss Merton. She is more in my style!"

"I see," said Guy, a little moodily, for he hardly relished those remarks about the beautiful girl who had aroused his interest. "You think the other heartless!"

"Not exactly that," he answered slowly, and reflectively. "Rather say thoughtless, the thoughtlessness of youth. She does not mean to do the terrible amount of damage she does by her smiles and wiles, and coquettices. Of that I am sure; there is so much that is winning and womanly, and charming about her, and yet—

"Evil is wrought by want of thought,

As well as want of heart."

"Of course it is," said Tredennis. "A thoughtless woman is nearly as bad as a heartless one."

"Nearly, not quite, and that is a great deal, sometimes."

"An enigmatical speech, cher Claude, and one, I confess, I do not entirely comprehend. However, this is my dance with this 'ladie faire' whom we have been discussing at such length, so adieu for the present."

"There is one thing I promise you," Chesterfield called after him, "and that is that you will enjoy it. She is perfection! Taglioni herself could not have been lighter."

And the Major spoke truly. Tredennis for many years had hardly danced at all, but he enjoyed to the full the pleasure of whirling round with Violet in his arms.

She was so light, so graceful, so easy; their steps were in perfect accord, and then her bronze head nestled so confidently against his shoulder, and she talked in soft, low tones, and looked up at him with such admiration in her blue eyes,

that he felt a sort of subtle intoxication stealing over him, and inclined to surrender to the charms of this fair damsel, despite the words of warning thrown out by his friend.

"Do you think you will like Lissington?" she asked, when the dance was over, and he had found her a cool seat in a dim corner of the corridor.

"I don't think I shall care for Lissington proper much," he acknowledged, frankly.

"You think it a—what do most of yours call it?" looking archly up at him.

"A hole!"

"And you are of the same opinion?"

"Well, yes; I must confess I am."

"It has not many attractions."

"Not in itself. The country round about seems pretty from the glances I got of it."

"It is lovely in parts!" she declared enthusiastically. "Where we live is pretty. The house is built close to the river; there is a wood at the back, and behind that a succession of rising hills, each a little taller than the other; and round about the cornfields, and beyond those the hop-fields, with here and there a patch of sorrel. You can't think how beautiful it is in autumn, before the grain is cut!"

"I shall hope to see it in all its beauty this next autumn."

"Of course. But you must see it before that; that is, I hope you will do so. My father always likes to have the house full of guests. It is so large; it seems empty, only three of us living there."

"That is yourself, Mr. Harcourt and Miss Merton?"

"Yes. Who told you Miss Merton lived with us—the Major?"

"Yes, the Major!" he assented.

"I thought so," and she laughed a little, and flattered her big, white feather fan.

"Why?"

"Oh, because he takes no end of an interest in Ruby."

"Indeed!"

"Now I am sure you know all about it, so don't pretend you don't, and try to look innocent."

"Really; I assure you, I don't know anything."

"Oh! Well, I will let it pass. How long do you think the '80th will be quartered here?"

"Impossible to say; I hope a long time," with a meaning glance.

"Don't you want to go back to India?"

"Certainly not. We were there such a long time, I grew utterly tired of it all. Early morning rides, brandy pawnee, black servants, punkahs, chutneys, curries, turbans, and all the other eastern things."

"And of flirtations. Doesn't everybody flirt very hard out there, having little else to do?"

"Some do; I did not," he went on, gravely, "as I don't approve of it."

"One can't always be serious in society," she objected, making a little pouting move that was pretty, and tantalizing, and tempting.

"It is not necessary to be serious. Still one can always be truthful, and straightforward and honest enough not to deceive others as to ultimate intentions."

"I see; you would be severe on a flirt?" with an appealing glance out of the soft blue eyes, so innocent, so clear, so childlike in their expression.

"I think I should be," he answered, slowly; "that is, on an intentional and deliberate one. Some women can't help attracting and fascinating, as some men can't. It is their fate to bewitch, to gain love and affection, whether they want it or not."

"That must be annoying sometimes!"

"Yes, it is. I have a friend who possesses a singular power of attraction. Men and women both like him; some of the latter go so far as to adore him."

"Really! Is he handsome?"

"A perfect face."

"Fair, blonde moustache, I suppose, and grey eyes?" looking at Guy's.

"No; on the contrary, he is very dark, with

black moustache and brown eyes. A splendid figure, and a good all-round sort of fellow."

"By that you mean——?" she interrogated.

"That he is good at almost all sports. A good shot, a magnificent rider, a fair oar, a swift runner, a crack billiard player, and a perfect lady's man."

"Then of course this rare avis of yours sings!"

"Yes. He has a fine baritone voice."

"That completes the list of his perfections."

"Perhaps. Only no words can convey his singular charm of manner; it is almost like a spell."

In after years Violet would often think of this speech and endorse it, by the light of an experience half sweet, wholly bitter.

"And what is his name?"

"Paul Atcherley."

"Paul Atcherley," she repeated, slowly and lingeringly; "a pretty name!"

"Yes, it suits him."

"Of course your friend is in the army!"

"Yes. He is a captain in the Life Guards."

"Then ranks as a colonel," said Miss Harcourt, quickly, who was well up in all military matters, and had the "Army List" at her fingers' ends.

"You are right. He eclipses me in point of rank."

"But in nothing else," she said audaciously, with a glance half coquettish, half admiring at him.

"I can't agree there," he returned, frankly.

"When is this wonder coming to Lissington?"

"Not while the London season lasts; of that you may be quite sure. Nothing would induce him to tear himself away from the metropolitan delights until July is on the wane."

"Then you mean to ask him here?"

"Yes. He will be sure to ride in the steeple-chase."

"I am looking forward to the races. I delight in them!"

"Three months before they will take place!"

"Yes. I must fill in the time as best I can."

"And I will try and help you. We must get up some novel entertainments."

"We can try to. Only there seems to be nothing new under the sun," she sighed, and her companion looked at her and wondered for the twentieth time at the weary air that sometimes was so striking about her, more so as she was very young, had beauty, money, and everything, apparently, that the most difficult woman could desire.

CHAPTER III.

MANY people envied Charles Harcourt his fine old house, with its charming garden full of old, old oaks and elms, silver-stemmed birches and copper beeches, and a host of other grand trees, and the rich meadow and grain lands lying around; his right of fishing in the Liss, his preserves in the wood, and his many other worldly possessions, not excepting his lovely daughter.

It had been in the possession of the Harcourt family for many generations, had undergone many vicissitudes and transformations, and, in fact, had little of the original building left, which dated from Bluff King Hal's time; still the grey stone house as it stood was antique, and looked its best one sultry May morning shortly after the ball; lighted up by a stream of golden light, that fell on it from a cloudless sky, irradiating its mullioned windows and queer gables and facade covered with flowers and climbing ivy.

On the general lawn, under the shade of a huge oak that had braved the storms of centuries, the girls were sitting—Ruby busy with some useful work for the mission-basket, which would be round in a day or two, Violet lying back in an indolently graceful way in a softly-cushioned easy-chair, a bit of lacework in her hand, at which she was every now and then made a pretence to be busy with. An ornamental rôle suited her better than a useful one, and she generally contented herself with looking pretty, and seldom or never troubled herself with anything really useful. Certainly she made a charming picture, lying back amid the blue cushions that

matched in colour her beautiful eyes, her bronze-coloured tresses resting daintily against the bright satin, the white morning dress showing off the lissom figure to great advantage, displaying the slim waist, the graceful lines of the sloping shoulders, and the firm, white throat and swelling bust admirably.

Happiness and health shone in the youthful face and the great bright eyes, that seemed to have caught and kept a tinge of the cloudless morning skies. What wonder that she was the acknowledged belle of Lissington, for amongst all the pretty faces that thronged the town where could a fairer than hers be found? There was such a mingling of mockery and melancholy about it, a mixture of mischievousness and sadness that made it most attractive, invested it and her with a singular charm.

Miss Merton, though undeniably handsome, lost by contrast with her brilliant cousin, looked older and darker and more common-place than she did when alone, and really was an excellent foil for her butterfly relative. They were excellent friends, never having a difference, never clashing in any matter, even affairs of the heart—for those who admired Miss Harcourt were hardly likely to divide their admiration and give Miss Merton a share of it; and then the latter had so much common sense, and was so thoroughly amiable, that she always gave way, and let her cousin take precedence in everything.

"Violet!"

No answer. Violet's blue eyes were fixed in space, a dreamy expression in their soft depths.

"Violet!" Miss Merton repeated louder, while her busy fingers wielded the needle deftly.

"Violet!" again still louder.

"Well. What is it?"

Miss Harcourt came back from dreamland, and turned a lazy glance on her companion.

"Do you know I have spoken three times?"

"No; have you?"

"Yes. You were evidently asleep."

"Perhaps I was. It is too hot to do anything save doze."

"Well, rouse up now; I want to speak to you."

"What about? The mission-basket! I really can't make anything for it, but if you want a sovereign to buy that horrid coarse flannel," looking at the little petticoat the other was making, "I shall be most happy to give it you."

"Thanks. I don't want any money, though, just now. I am curious, and——"

"Ye gods, is it possible you own to such a thing? What are you inquisitive about?"

"What do you think of him?"

"I have told you repeatedly," returned Violet demurely, with a twinkle in her bright eyes, "that I think the Major extremely nice, a perfect gentleman, generous, kindly, good-looking, and a sufficiently good match not to be refused by any girl who does not want to marry a duke or a millionaire."

"Nonsense, Violet!" said Miss Merton, quickly, while a blush spread over her dark face. "I was not alluding to him. He is an old acquaintance."

"And you want my opinion about some new admirer of yours?"

"Vi, what a rattle-pate you are!"

"Have I ever tried to deny it?"

"No, you are rather proud of it. I want to know what you think of Captain Tredeennis!"

"Oh, I think he is very handsome!" after a distinct pause.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"I think he is charming. A beautiful face, if one may apply such a term to a man."

"You may, my dear, so far as I am concerned," answered Violet, nonchalantly.

"Do be serious."

"I am as serious as a judge."

"He is interesting too."

"To you," with a saucy glance. "What will the Major say?"

"Nothing. He has no right to say anything."

"But he soon will have, or I am much mistaken."

"And he is always pleased when his friend is liked. You know they are Jonathan and David?"

"Yes, I know," indifferently.

"He seems never to be able to do enough to make Guy Tredeennis forget the past, and the sorrow that blighted his life."

"He seems to succeed too."

"For a while. But he tells me the Captain is very mournful and sad when alone—still feels his loss keenly."

"We must try and make him forget it," said Violet, softly, a gentler look stealing over her fair face. "It was so sad, so terrible, to have all his life blighted on his wedding-eve!"

"Horrible! What happiness for the woman who could banish the clouds—make him like his old self!"

"She would have to be almost a magician!"

"I think not. Only fair, and loving, and true," and she glanced at her companion, and there was a brief silence.

The shafts of golden light fell on Violet's bronze hair, turning it into threads of "living gold"; on the pure skin, bringing out its pearly tints; on the white gown, and tiny feet, peeping "like mice" from under her dress. The spring flowers nodded their head; the soft winds swept lazily by, hurrying gaudy butterflies with it. There was a buzz of many insects, and that was all; no other sound broke the stillness, until a sharp click told that the gate leading to the meadow had been opened.

"Did you hear the gate? Someone is coming!"

"Yes."

And Miss Harcourt sat up and smoothed a rebellious tress into its place, while both listened to the slow step that came sauntering up the gravelled walk.

The owner of the step came in view at last—a tall, fair man, in a tweed suit, with a little switch in his hand. His sad eyes brightened as they rested on the girls; and he came forward more quickly.

"Miss Harcourt, I have availed myself of your permission, and came in by the meadow-gate," he said, as he took her hand, his eyes resting lingeringly on her fair face.

"I am glad you did," she rejoined brightly. "Most of our friends come that way. That is," she added, seeing a look of disappointment cloud his face, "our intimate privileged friends."

"Thanks," he said, gratefully, in low tones, pressing the hand he still held.

"Miss Merton, industrious as usual!" he remarked, passing to her side.

"Yes, I am generally busy," she agreed, with a frank smile.

"Making a great contrast to me," laughed Violet. "I am generally lazy, and do nothing!"

"We can't all be bees," he said, gently.

"That means that I am a butterfly!" she pointed out.

"I did not say so," he rejoined, seriously.

"You half insinuated it."

"No, really, I assure you, I had no such intention."

"And if I say I don't believe!" she quaffed, looking full into his sad eyes.

"You will not," he responded, in a tone so low that it escaped Miss Merton's ear. "You must believe me!"

"Must I?" murmured the girl, her eyes falling beneath the steady gaze of his.

"Of course."

"I do not see why I should!" she objected.

"Perhaps you will some day," he answered, pointedly.

"Perhaps," she agreed, lightly. "And now where is your David?"

"My David!" she echoed, in surprise.

"Yes; Major Chesterfield."

"He has gone to town on business!"

"Does he stay long?" with a glance at her cousin's downcast face.

"Only a few days! It is not likely that he would stay away a moment longer than he could help," and he, too, glanced at Miss Merton.

"Of course not. I shall be glad when he

comes back ; he is so jovial and mirthful ; his fun is quite infectious."

" Do you like mirthful people, Miss Harcourt ? "

" Sometimes. At others I prefer serious ones. It depends upon my mood, I suppose."

" Possibly. Melancholy folk as a rule, however, are shamed."

" How horrible of people to do it ! " cried Violet, impetuously. " Everyone ought to try and lighten the burden of those that sorrow." And as she spoke a new longing came over her to give joy to this saddened man ; to bring pleasure to his daily life ; to see the sad look fly from his eyes, and a happy, contented expression take its place. She felt drawn to him, since she knew of his love episode that ended so tragically, and glowed with the desire to alter what was wrong, and give him back some of his lost youth and happiness.

" Everyone is not so heroic ! " he said, lightly ; " and people generally have troubles enough of their own without taking the burdens of others on their shoulders."

" Some have few troubles, and often would be willing to lighten the sorrows their friends feel if they might."

Their eyes met as she spoke these words ; and, as he smiled back into hers, a tie seemed established between them.

" There is the gate again ! " observed Miss Merton, looking up from her occupation. " Who is that, I wonder ? "

" Gerard, I should think ! " returned Violet.

" How can you tell ? " inquired Tredennis.

" By his step. It is sharp and brisk."

" Unlike mine ! " he remarked.

" Yes, quite the opposite. Well, Gerard, what news have you brought us ? " as her cousin approached.

" Not much," replied the young man, with a glance at the Captain that was not altogether kindly.

" You ought to have a perfect budget ! "

" Why ! There is nothing going on in that drowsy old place ! " nodding towards the town.

" Still you are such a gadabout," put in Miss Merton. " You ought to gather news as the bees do honey ! "

" Quite a poetical simile," he laughed. " We shall have you staring it in print soon, Ru ! "

" Hardly," she rejoined, with her quiet smile. " You won't give us that sensation, even to wake us up ! "

" No, I am afraid I can't oblige you."

" You might do something, Gerard ! " said Violet, quickly, " towards enlivening us, and the inhabitants of Kensington and the neighbourhood generally."

" Why—how ? What can a poor bachelor like I am do ? "

" A great deal if you chose to exert yourself."

" I must, for it will be imperatively necessary for me to refute that insinuation of lazy idleness. Now what can I do ? Give me your commands ! "

" Get up some private theatricals. Give an *al-france fête*, or a picnic ! "

" Certainly. May I choose which, oh ! Queen ? "

" We will graciously allow you to do that."

" Then I decide for the picnic ! "

" Very well. We will discuss it during luncheon. You will stay, Captain Tredennis ! Will your duties allow you to ? "

" I shall be most happy to do so, since I am at liberty."

" Then come ! There is the gong, and Deverill can't bear anyone to be late. You stay, of course, Gerard ! "

" Of course, chère cousine," he responded, lightly, and together they all crossed the smooth lawn, studded with silver and copper beeches, where a pair of gorgeous plumed peacocks were sunning themselves, in company with almost a pack of hounds, for the canines clustered before the house numbered at least a score, and ranged from a mighty Russian wolfhound down to a tiny Spanish Chicot dog, no bigger than a kitten.

" My pets ! " explained Miss Harcourt, with a light laugh, waving her hand towards the dogs, who pressed forward to meet her, the little

Chicot dog wriggling and almost walking on its head in a most extraordinary fashion.

" You are fond of animals ! " interrogated Tredennis, who was walking beside her.

" I love them ! " she returned, enthusiastically, her blue eyes sparkling.

" It is a good trait," he remarked, approvingly, watching her as she fondled the little white dog, and half-wishing he could change places with the fortunate tyke, and receive the caresses in its stead.

" The only one I have, then," she rejoined, with another carefree laugh, as she put her sun-shade in the stand in the hall, and led the way to the morning room, where luncheon was laid, the great dining-room, which was a trifle huge and gloomy, only being used when several people were expected.

" You belie your nature ! " apostolized Guy.

" I think not," she responded, with an air of reflection that was very charming.

" I hope you do," he said, gravely, as they entered the room—a quaint place, with painted ceiling and panelled walls, covered with pictures.

There were *Chiaros* by Guido, a Spanish lass by Murillo, velvet-eyed beauties by Velasquez, *Fra Angelico's* *Salute*, *sea-peaces* by Powell and Dubbles, a Charles the Second fair one by Lely, sunny-faced maidens by Greuze, *Sombered cavaliers* by Rubens, with a host of others ; some copies, some originals, all good, and interesting to the connoisseur, the faded hangings and velvets harmonising well with them, and the antique furniture, and old glass and plate that decorated the table and sideboard, on the latter of which stood many cups and plates won by horses from the Harcourt stables in days gone by.

" Now, Gerard, tell me your plans ! " commanded Violet, when they were all seated at the well-laden table, she at the head, as her father was absent, Grandison at the foot, opposite her, a post which Tredennis secretly envied him immensely.

" About what, madame ? " asked her cousin, jestingly.

" About the picnic, of course," she replied. " What other of your plans do you think would interest me ? " with a little gesture implying scorn of him and his affairs.

" Not any," he acknowledged, candidly, for though he bore her a regard that was something more than cousinly, he had long ago given up all hope of ever being more to her than he was, and accepted his fate with a certain amount of pliegues and philosophy, though it invariably gave him a sharp twinge to see another at her side, until that one was repulsed and thrown over, and relegated to the ranks of the rejected, or the noble army of martyrs, as he coolly termed her numerous declined suitors.

" Very well, then, go on ; tell me what you are going to do ? "

" I don't know," he said, pointedly.

" If you don't, who does ? "

" You, I should think."

" How can I know anything about it ? " she demanded, with an assumption of anger, " when you are going to give the picnic ? "

" Very easily. Tell me what are your wishes, and I will carry them out ; that is the best thing to do in a case like this. Don't you think so, Tredennis ? " appealing to the Captain.

" Certainly ; there is no other course open to you," said the latter, at once.

" In that case," said Violet, coolly, " I will write you out a list of those I wish invited, and—"

" And pray let me know those whom you do not wish invited, because if I am allowed to ask any of my own friends I may make a blunder, and bring you face to face with a person whom you don't wish to meet."

" Rest assured, dear boy, you shall have a list of the black-balled. And now, to continue, I propose that we and all the guests shall drive over to your place, and start from there, and—"

" Supposing some of the 'guests' have nothing to drive in ! What then ? " he interrupted again.

" Your interruptions are quite unnecessary,"

she told him, with great dignity. " They must either beg, borrow, hire, or steal vehicles ; and, if they can't, you must provide some for them ! "

" Thanks. Anything else ? "

" Several things. After meeting, we will drive to Sheldon Roads, lunch there, stroll about, and amuse ourselves as best we can ; then have tea in the Abbott's Room, and drive back at our leisure. What do you think of that programme ? "

" Fairly good," answered Gerard ; " only if I might I could improve on it."

" Do so, then, by all means. What is your improvement ? "

" This. After an early tea, drive back to my place, and finish the evening with a dance, and then a drive home by moonlight ! "

" Capital ! " agreed Violet, clapping her hands. " I approve of your suggestion. You are a dear, good boy ! " and, luncheon being over, she rose, and patted him lightly on the head ; and he, with cousinly freedom, caught and kissed the soft, white fingers, and Tredennis felt an unaccountable sense of annoyance pervade his whole being, and as he strolled back to his quarters he asked himself if he were than once.—Was this lovely girl to be trusted, or was she merely a heartless flirt ?

CHAPTER IV.

THE day of Grandison's, or rather Violet's, picnic arrived in due course, and was perfect. A soft, sunny June day ; the air heavy with the perfume of roses and the scent of new-mown hay.

Nature was in one of her soft, slightly serious moods, no glowing heat, only a delicious, balmy warmth, just the right thing for an out-of-door entertainment.

Most of the young people bidden to the gathering thought this as they bowled along the white country roads, and were well pleased with themselves and everybody else.

There was exception to this, of course, as there was the host who was discontented. And well he might be, for Violet, the woman he loved, at whose bidding he arranged the whole affair, had coolly declined to drive to the ruins with him in his smart phaeton, and went off with Guy Tredennis, alone—in her own pony carriage, which easily held four ! And what added considerably to Grandison's discomfort was the fact of Mr. Harcourt being present at the start from his place, and looking not one whit angry or put out at his daughter going off in such a marked way with the Captain.

It seemed significant, for her father, as a rule, was particular about her doings, and surely would not have allowed this unless Guy had given some hint of his intentions.

Altogether the master of Grandison How was not in a happy frame of mind, and showed it in his downcast looks.

" What ails you, oh ! knight of the rueful countenance ? " queried Violet, when they were arrived at the ruins, and some of the party had strolled away, leaving only a few to superintend the arrangement of luncheon.

" Nothing ! " he returned, rather shortly, not over well pleased at the tally. " What should all me ? "

" That is exactly what I want to learn," she retorted coolly. " Most people would say you have everything to make you look pleasant and cheerful, instead of dull and gloomy."

" So I have, of course," he assented, feeling he must shake off his annoyance, and play the part of host agreeably.

" Then look pleasant," she ordered, imperatively.

" I will, *charmente reine, de mon cœur*," he replied, with a skillful assumption of gaiety, as he turned to give some orders to the grooms.

" Captain Tredennis, are you coming to help us ? " she queried of the soldier, who was sauntering away, not wishing to witness what he thought looked likely to prove a tiff between the cousins.

" I am at your disposal," he answered, readily.

"And you, Major Chesterfield?"

"I am at Miss Merton's," he returned at once, with a half-comical glance at her, that covered her with blushes and confusion.

"Well, come then, we must set to work," and for once in a way the fair Violet actually exerted herself, and was quite useful.

"Where is this to go?" asked Gerard, when the cloth was spread on the smooth board, holding out a huge pigeon pie.

"Where do you intend to sit?" countermanded his impulsive little cousin.

"Next you, of course!" he said, audaciously.

"Then put it here, and the tongue here"—indicating a spot near—"for Captain Tredenns to carve."

"Let me get rid of this load," implored Chesterfield, who had just taken a hamper of wine from one of the servants.

"No one wants you to kill yourself by dragging it about," laughed Miss Merton.

"I hope you don't," he responded, with a meaning look at her.

"Certainly not," she acquiesced promptly. "Let me assist you in getting rid of the burden. We can put a brace of bottles at each corner."

"Capital idea—and flank the carver's seat, with a quartette."

"Yes."

"Gerard, have you brought any flowers?" asked Miss Harcourt. "You know I can't possibly enjoy my luncheon unless there are plenty about."

"I told Simmons to send up a hamper, and here it is!" as the coachman brought it up.

"That's right. What a good boy you are. These are lovely!" as she arranged some snow-white roses in a bed of moss.

"Not more beautiful than these," holding out some deep red ones.

"No. Those are magnificent."

"Then throw away that wretched little moss-rose bud, and have this spray."

"Thanks," and she pinned a trio of lovely blossoms in her bosom, their blood-red colour contrasting well with her white gown.

"Now, is all ready?"

"I think so."

"Then we must sound the assembly," and he struck a small gong he had several times.

It had the desired effect. The guests strolled up to the spot where they were in twos and threes; and soon all were seated, enjoying the good things, and laughing and chatting away merrily, Grandison appearing the gayest of the gay, despite that his heart was heavy as lead, as he noted the glances that passed between Violet and Tredenns.

"Are the rains really worth inspecting?" inquired Guy, when luncheon was nearly over.

"I think we," she responded; "but then I may be partial. I have known them since early childhood, and have spent many pleasant days here."

"That makes a difference, of course."

"Naturally. To many they only seem a few tumbles down old walls; to me they are invested with the charm of early associations, and, apart from that, I think they are really interesting."

"May I ask you, then, to be my *cicerone*, and show me all the places of note and interest?" asked her companion, an eager look in his handsome eyes.

"I shall be delighted to tell you all I know," she said, at once.

And following the example of Miss Merton and the Major they strolled off, amid the crumbling walls of the old Tudor Monastery, where the lichen grew and the ivy clung and crept, and all was old world and time-worn.

She explained what a beautiful place it had been, and how ruthless Harry the Eighth had reduced it to a semi-ruinous state, and driven out its Monkish inhabitants, and showed the refectory, and the kitchens, and the grand hall—or, rather, showed what was left of them—and the time passed pleasantly to both.

"You must love this part of the country?" he remarked, at last.

"I do," she answered, frankly. "I think it charming!"

"Have you travelled much?"

"That is an insinuation," she laughed.

"Why? In what way?"

"You mean that if I had I should think little or nothing of my native county?"

"I did not mean that. I was going to say that it reminded me somewhat of the champagne country in parts of France."

"You admire it, then?"

"Undoubtedly I do," he assented, but his eyes were on her fair young face, and not on the flower-gemmed meads, rippling streams, and waving boughs around them.

"Of course, you have travelled a great deal!"

"Yes," replied Guy, "I have been nearly everywhere and seen everything. Your father and I found much to chat about. He has been nearly as great a wanderer as myself."

"Yes. He delights in talking about his tours more with you than with anyone else."

"I feel flattered."

"Why should you?" she asked, with a sudden uplifting of the heavy lids, which was a trick of hers. "He likes you so much it is only natural that he should like your society also."

"Perhaps; and I—what can I say, how can I tell you, what pleasure, what more than pleasure, it is to me to be with him, to feel that he likes me, to spend several hours every day under the same roof with yourself. Oh, Violet," he said, carried away by the intoxicating feeling of delight, that thrilled him at her soft, luring glance, "will you ever believe how much you have done for me, how much you have given me back, and will you think of how much more you can do for me if you will, if you can learn to—"

But just then, in the midst of his impassioned speech, the sound of laughter and voices drew near, and a merry party turned the corner of the old wall where they were standing, and came towards them.

"Violet, it is time for tea," said Grandison, whose quick eyes took in the whole situation, the dash on the Captain's cheek, the passionate light in his eyes, the down-drooped head of his beautiful cousin, and, above all, a certain air of shyness about her that was most unusual.

"Not yet, surely!" she managed to say steadily; but she did not raise her eyes, or look at him.

"Yes, indeed it is, if we mean to get back, and have any dancing to-night."

"Of course, we must not miss that. We must hurry," and she walked away beside her cousin, and Tredenns followed with the others, a sense of disappointment and chagrin strong on him.

This sensation deepened when the hurried gipsy tea was over, and he saw her mount into Grandison's phæton, and drive off with him, leaving her pony carriage for Miss Merton and Major Chesterfield, who were both secretly delighted at the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* drive, though they did offer a seat to Guy, who promptly declined it, knowing that in this case two were company and three would be none, and who got on the drag with his brother officers and some fast and rather free young ladies from the town of Lessington, who dubbed Tredenns awfully slow and humdrum, which was not surprising, seeing that he answered their questions at random, and was quite impulsive and unimpassioned under the fire of their gay rally and Mvly smiles.

The fiddlers were tuning, and the harpist and pianist getting ready when Guy, after making a slight alteration in his toilet, strolled into the dancing-room at Grandison How. He felt dull and depressed, totally different from his friend the Major, who having proposed and been accepted during the homeward drive was in jubilant spirits, hardly able to contain his delight.

Tredenns looked eagerly round the room, and there, standing beside his host, was the woman whom he loved, for he no longer tried to disguise that fact from himself. She looked more lovely in the thin white flowing dress she had donned than ever, and the three blood-red roses still bloomed at her breast.

But charming, alluring though she was, he made no effort to approach her. To the man's honest, straightforward nature her conduct was

inexplicable. He could not gauge the depth of that queer, half-tender, half-cruel nature, that was coquettish and fond of admiration and change, and yet wept bitterly over the dismissal of a discarded lover, and that really for the time felt deep sorrow.

If she loved him why had she driven off with her cousin after his interrupted declaration without so much as a word or a glance for him? It was an enigma to him. He could not understand that she wished him to follow her up and woo fiercely, so that all the world might see how well loved and dearly coveted she was.

No, he did not understand, and so he held aloof, and watched as she whirled round the long oak-floored old room, in other men's arms, and occupied himself with a gloomy retrospect. This did not exactly suit Miss Violet, who hardly meant to scare away her handsome, interesting admirer; and after a while she stopped near him, and sending away her partner on an errand, gave Guy a beseeching little glance, which, from her beautiful blue eyes, was full of meaning and entreaty.

He gave way before it at once, and came up to her.

"Don't you mean to ask me even once to-night?" she questioned, with a pretty air of timidity.

"You seemed so well engaged," he returned, "I did not think you would care to give me any."

"I would rather dance with you than with anyone else!" she murmured.

"Do you really mean that?" he queried, eagerly, a glad light leaping to his grey eyes.

"Yes."

"Then give me this!" and hardly waiting for permission he threw his arm round her waist and whirled her away.

He was well pleased, so was she. "A change came o'er the spirit of his dream," for she danced with no one else, and allowed him to devote himself exclusively to her.

"What a lovely night it is!" she said, softly, as they stood in the deep embrasure of a window in the picture-gallery, which was deserted, save by themselves, and floods of silver.

"Charming!" agreed her companion, only he was looking at her, thinking of her, and not of the night.

"I wish the whole year could be Jane."

"Would you not tire of it then?"

"No, I think not. What can be more beautiful than this languorous breeze, perfumed with the richness of a thousand flowers, the song of the nightingale, the countless myriads of stars in the heavens, the warmth, the softness, the beauty of summer, which is over all!"

"No, it is enchanting! I wonder what you would think of an Italian night, or one under Moorish skies, or 'neath the brilliance of the Southern Cross!"

"Ah! I can't tell," and she drew a long breath.

"You think you would like it!" with a searching glance at the beautiful face.

"I am sure I should, but I shall never have the chance of experiencing such delight."

"Why not?"

"My father says he is too old to travel now."

"You might travel with someone else, Violet," he said, with meaning.

"Hardly!" she returned, wilfully misunderstanding him. "Father would not let me go with Baby or aunt."

"No; but he might let you go with—me!" Violet, darling!" he went on quickly, catching her hands, and holding them pressed against his breast, "don't you know I love you! Don't you know that you have driven away the shadows from my life, have given me back my lost happiness? Have I startled you, dearest?" he asked, softly, trying to rein in and curb his feelings in consideration of her youth. "I did not mean to, only I want you so much; I feel I must speak. Is there another? For Heaven's sake, tell me! Is there one more fortunate than myself?"

His face was pale, his eyes glowed, his clasp

tightened involuntarily on the little hands he held.

"Answer, I implore you. Is there anyone else?"

"No," she answered at last, in faint tones, while the colour flickered uncertainly in her cheeks, "there is no one else."

"Thank Heaven! Then I may hope!"

"Yes," she whispered, and raising her eyes she met the fond passion of his.

The next moment she was in his arms, held closely to his breast, his strong arms holding her slight form in a protecting embrace, while heart beat to heart in a rapture of joy.

"You love me!" he queried, after a while, looking down at the beautiful face on his breast.

"I have not said so," she replied, with a touch of her usual coquetry.

"No; but I want to hear you say, 'Guy, I love you.' Now I am waiting."

"Guy, I love you," she repeated, obediently.

"And always will."

"And always will!"

"I trust so, my darling!" he said, gravely. "I could not bear another disappointment. It would kill me!"

"Guy," she queried, quickly, laying a hand on each shoulder, and gazing up at him steadfastly, "tell me truly, did you love her better than you do me?"

"No," he answered, hoarsely, faithless to his old love now in every way. "I love you best. You believe me!"

"Yes, I believe," and she laid her head back on his breast, and leant there within the circle of his arms; and outside the moonbeams silvered all the earth, and the scent of the great white lilies burdened the air, and the nightingales still sang unto his mate of love, and the languorous breezes went by and whispered secrets to the slumbering flowers.

"Gerard, congratulate me! I am engaged!" announced Miss Harcourt later on, as her cousin stood beside her ready to shawl her for the drive home.

"Engaged!" he muttered, while his face went deathly white.

"Yes! Aren't you glad!" she asked, gaily, and with unconscious cruelty. "You have often said you wished to see me married and settled!"

"Yes, of course!" he returned, recovering his composure by a mighty effort. "Who is the favoured one?"

"Captain Tredennis. What do you think of my choice?"

"It could not be better. He is a noble fellow."

"Yes."

"Violet," he went on, seriously, "I hope you do not mean to play any of your tricks on him. He is too good for it, and then think how much he has already suffered! Be true to him—if you can be!"

"Don't lecture me, dear boy," she answered, lightly. "It never does me any good, and—and I think I love Guy too well to treat him badly," and wafting him a kiss she went out, and stepping into the brougham drove off with Ruby and her father; and Gerard, as he watched her go, did not know who he felt most sorry for—himself or Guy Tredennis.

CHAPTER V.

The harvest moon was lighting the golden cornfields with its bright beams, shining into the windows of Harcourt Beach and on two figures standing at one—a man with blonde hair and tawny moustache, and a woman fair as a poet's dream, in whose blue eyes the moonbeams loved to linger.

She leant with careless grace against the shutters of the open window, toying with a crimson rose that in her abstraction she crushed, and as her fingers pressed it a blood-red drop of moisture, flowing as if from its heart, trailed slowly over her white fingers and dropped on the window-sill.

"Don't," said her companion, quickly, while an irrepressible shudder shook him from head to foot; "don't. Let me have it!"

"Why?" she asked, looking up at him dreamily.

"Because I have an odd fancy about that rose."

"About this!" looking at the crushed blossom. "What is it?"

"I fancy it is my heart that you are crushing and wounding; killing in sheer idleness and thoughtlessness."

"Do you?" she said, slowly, a sudden pallor on her face.

"Yes. Give it me," and he took the poor crushed rose and tossed it through the casement.

"What a ridiculous idea, Guy!"

"Of course, darling!"

"It was a beautiful flower."

"Before you killed it, yes. I will get you another. Come!"

And together they strolled to the conservatory, and Guy gathered her a spray of stephanotis and maidenhair fern, and pinned it in the breast of her white gown, telling her fondly that he wanted her to look her best and fairest.

"For your races, your own familiar friend, Paul Atcherley," she smiled.

"Yes. He is so critical, and I know he will be able to find no fault with you."

"Don't be too sure," she returned, with another smile. "I may be all faults in his eyes."

"Impossible!"

"You are a partial judge, Guy."

"I may be, but not too partial."

"He is late," she said, irresolutely, looking towards the drawing-room, down the whole length of which she could see from the conservatory where she stood.

"There, the door is opening. You ought to be by your father," and together they stepped out from the cool dusk into the blaze of the brilliantly-lighted room.

As they did so, through the door held wide open by the butler, came a tall, dark man, with a singularly powerful, winning face, and a splendid figure.

Guy was at his side in a moment, and introduced him to Mr. Harcourt, and then—then—to Violet.

Paul Atcherley's eyes rested for a full moment on Violet's beautiful face, and a look of keen admiration sprang up in them; then it died away, and he was bowing over her hand, and uttering some polite commonplace. Guy saw the look swift and quick, vanishing though it was, and he construed it rightly into admiration of his fiance.

"I have long wished to make your acquaintance, Miss Harcourt," said Colonel Atcherley, when they were seated at dinner, he in the place of honour, at her right hand.

"Indeed!" she replied, with well-affected surprise.

"Yes, I have heard so much of you from Guy."

"Really. How disappointing it always is to meet people of whom you have heard a great deal isn't it?" she queried, gaily.

"Sometimes, not always," he responded, with a meaning in his look and tone.

"I think there is hardly ever an exception to the rule."

"That means that you are disappointed in me!" he laughed, gaily; "for of course Guy has told you a heap about me. We have been friends since he was six years old and I eight, and always have had an exalted opinion of each other."

"Not shared by the world in general, perhaps," she said, mischievously, looking at him with her beautiful bright eyes, full of fun and merriment.

"Perhaps not," he agreed, laughingly. "Close friends are apt to consider each other perfection."

"Of course. It is only right that Jonathan should praise David, and think him a wonder."

"Of course."

"Do you know here we all thought Major Chesterfield was his *Fides Achates*, and most faithful friend and admirer!"

"And so I believe he is," returned Atcherley, quickly, while an inexplicable look clouded his

eyes and dimmed their beauty for awhile. "An honest, more upright, unselfish fellow than the Major does not exist!"

"That would seem as though you mean to convey that you don't think yourself unselfish and honest," remarked Miss Harcourt, with another glance at him, more searching and observant than any she had yet bestowed on him.

"Possibly I do," he answered, with an affectation of nonchalance, though he was hardly prepared for such a shrewd remark from this beautiful, childish, innocent-looking girl. "At any rate, I can't lay claim to being unselfish, for I am a most luxurious, egotistical brute!"

He seemed carried away by a feeling of bitterness and regret as he spoke; perhaps a memory of some of the hapless creatures who had loved him, and lost all they prized for his sake, crossed his mind, and gave him a salutary twinge.

"You are like me, then," remarked Violet, coolly. "I am selfish and egotistical!"

"How do you know?" he asked in surprise. "Surely no one has ever told you so!"

"Oh, no!" she returned, with a ripply laugh, full of sweetness. "No one has told me so. People, as a rule, don't say disagreeable things to me."

"I should think not!" he agreed, his dark eyes dwelling on the exquisite beauty of her face and figure.

"But, of course, we know our own shortcomings," she went on, gravely, "though we may not admit having any. Still, there they are, and can't be concealed—from ourselves. They may be from others, which is unfortunate sometimes. Don't you think so?"

"I hardly know," he replied, reflectively. "If we love anyone very much, hopelessly, in fact—I think we would prefer not to see their feelings; to be blind to all that is disagreeable and repellent; to believe, in fact, a tissue of falsehoods rather than see the bare, unlovely character and characteristics of those for whom we care."

"Still," she expostulated, "the true knowledge of a person's disposition and failing, might cure love, and save us from much misery and wretchedness!"

"It might," said the Colonel, slowly; "but, in most cases, I think it would. Now, Miss Harcourt, tell me candidly, would you rather be blind to the end where you love, or have your eyes open, and be cured?"

"I think I would rather be blind to the end," she answered, with equal slowness; and as her eyes met the glance of his magnificent dark ones, she felt that if she cared for him she would not wish to hear, would not listen to one word against him, let it save her from what misery is might!

"So would I," he murmured, in low tones. "Where ignorance is bliss, &c. What is the use of knowing too much about those we love. Take the goods the gods provide, and be happy; that is the best way."

"Yes."

But even as she spoke a curious feeling stole over her—a sense of disappointment, weariness, distrust, such as she had never experienced before; and her companion, seeing something was wrong, exerted all his brilliant powers of fascination, and managed before long to banish the cloud from his fair hostess's face.

"You are coming to the races?" he said, later on, when they joined the ladies in the drawing-room.

"Oh, yes!" she answered with animation. "I have been looking forward to them for months."

"You are fond of racing!"

"I delight in it. Only we have so little of it here."

"Have you seen the Derby and the Oaks?"

"No."

"Nor been to Ascot?" in surprise.

"No, nor even been to Ascot."

"You should persuade your father to take you."

"I am afraid he wouldn't."

"Surely your powers of persuasion would

make him!" with a bold, admiring glance at her.

"No, I am afraid not," blushing under the fiery look he gave her. "He does not much approve of racing."

"I see."

"And living so far from London, which, by the way, is a place he cordially detests, it would necessitate our staying in or near town for some time."

"Of course; and Mr. Harcourt would not like that."

"No; not at all."

"Then you will have to be contented with a simple steeplechase for the present?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Only for the present," with another look at her. "Of course, when you are married, Guy will take you anywhere you please—do just as you like—be a perfect slave to you."

"Yes, perhaps," and she moved a little restlessly.

Somewhat or the other she did not feel at ease in Paul Atcherley's society. Under the fire of his glances she lost that ease of manner which was natural to her, and became timid and embarrassed.

"I don't think there is any 'perhaps' in the matter. However, I hope you will back me. My colours are black and scarlet."

"Yes, I will back you," she responded, slowly.

"Back me to win!" he went on, with a queer laugh; "and, Miss Harcourt, say 'I wish you all success in your race—a brilliant victory!'"

"I wish you all success," she said, faintly.

"And—a brilliant victory."

"And—a brilliant victory," she added, trying to struggle against the feeling of mastery this man exercised over her.

"That is right. Thanks, Guy," as Tredennis approached, "Miss Harcourt has just been wishing me success, and a victory over all other competitors."

"Naturally. Being my friend, she would prefer to see you win before anyone else, wouldn't you, Vi?" with a frank smile full of tenderness on his face, as he turned to his promised wife.

"Naturally," she answered, with a faint smile.

"Are you ill—tired?" he queried, eagerly, seeing there was something wrong, from her listless manner and pale cheeks.

"I am tired," she admitted, reluctantly, not looking at him, but playing with her fan. "It is so hot to-night."

"Yes, it is close. Perhaps you rode too far to-day, dearest!" he added in lower tones. "You must not over-fatigue yourself."

"No; it is nothing. I shall be quite well to-morrow," with a little impatient gesture and way which he had never noticed in her before.

"We must not keep you up," he went on, with a wistful glance at her lovely, downcast face. "Good-night, darling!"

"Good-night," she returned, and for a brief moment her soft, cool fingers lay in his. No warmer farewell could pass between them in public. Then next Colonel Atcherley held her hand, and the pressure of his was firmer, closer, longer than Guy's, and then both gentlemen turned away, and after making their adieux to their host, left and drove to the barracks together in Guy's dog-cart.

"What do you think of her?" asked Tredennis, after a short silence.

"She is the loveliest woman I have ever seen," returned Atcherley.

"That is high praise!"

"It would be impossible to say too much in laudation of such beauty," he answered, just a trifle shortly; and then both relapsed again into silence, which lasted until they reached Guy's quarters.

CHAPTER VI.

The country round about Lladdington was looking its loveliest on the day of the races. A sort of summer haze hung over the landscape. The trees showed few signs of the approach of autumn, though many and many a summer-flower had long vanished. The Spanish chestnut fluttered their

broad leaves, that looked amber in the sunlight. Here and there the beeches showed a touch of gold and bronze. The great oaks were greenly fresh, the fern in all its summer beauty. Amid the rank grass blue-bells, oxlips, arums, even a few primroses, still bloomed, though their petals were almost white from long sojourn in the shade. In the cottage gardens sweet-williams bloomed in company with carnations, roses, gilly-flowers, calceolarias, scarlet geraniums, white petunias; while along the hedge climbed the purple clematis, and amid the ivy a few tendrils of honeysuckle turned and twisted.

The bees were humming and buzzing, feasting and enjoying themselves in the cheery sun-shine, riding the *glorie de Dijon* roses and their crimson brethren. Butterflies were plentiful, skimming over the bushes, crowned with giant clusters of fast ripening blackberries. Swallows were flying, and water-wagtails clustered round any pond or piece of water; while the sharp ping of the breech-loader was heard across the fields of stubble and turnip, to the great consternation of the conveys of partridges, who had to run the gauntlet of early sportsmen.

On that lovely September morn the solitude, the quiet country was disturbed by the progress of many vehicles, wending their way to the race-course, where all was noise and excitement, bustle and tumult, which reached fever heat when some of the horses appeared, mounted by their gentlemen jockeys, mostly officers of the Lancers, though there was a sprinkling of others from town—Hounslow, Aldershot, and other places of military occupation.

"Are you comfortable; can you see well?" asked Guy of Violet, as he settled her in one of the best places in the middle of the grand stand.

"Very, thanks! and I can see splendidly," she answered.

"I am glad of that. It wouldn't do for you to miss anything after having looked forward to it so long."

"No, Guy!" with a touch of hesitation in her manner.

"Yes, dear!"

"Is—there much danger, for—for the jockeys?" looking towards the paddock, from whence a rider had just come out on a horse that was rearing and capering fiercely.

"Well, of course, there is a certain amount of danger attending steeplechasing; but no man, that is, no man with an atom of pluck about him, would hang back from it, or give it up on that account."

"It must be horribly dangerous," she murmured, looking at that terrible hedge with the prickly bushes on its top. "Very few horses could clear it cleanly and safely."

"Any horse who is anything of a jumper could."

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"And—and—is the Major's horse good?"

"His mare is a capital animal. Good-tempered, light-mouthed, a good goer. There is no fear for him."

"And—Colonel Atcherley's?" she queried next, in a low tone; "is his horse to be trusted?"

"Firefly is to be trusted as far as jumping is concerned," he returned, quietly. "He is a trifle queer-tempered, but that is not of much account in racing, as a horse's energies are all expended in trying to out-distance his opponents. And he is a magnificent jumper!"

"Then—he may win," with a sparkle in her blue eyes.

"I think he stands a very good chance."

"I wish you were not going to ride, Claude," murmured Miss Merton to her intended, who had come up to the stand to see her for a moment.

"Why, dear!" he naked, in surprise.

"Oh, it is so dangerous!" she said, half-shamedly.

"Dangerous!" he ejaculated, "and do you think that would keep me from riding!"

"No, not at all, only—I shall be so glad when it is over, and you safe."

"My dearest!" he murmured, softly. "I shall be safe; your love is a charm that will keep

me from all danger!" and pressing her hand tenderly he went down and mounted his bonny grey mare, and rode out of the paddock side by side with Paul Atcherley, who sat on his coal-black horse like a centaur.

Firefly was a splendid animal, clean limbs, a fine head, had thin ears and red nostrils, showing good breeding, but there was something about his restless, rolling eyes, constantly showing the whites, that suggested a suspicion of temper, and a certain amount of unreliability about him that might have made some men nervous of riding him.

Not so the man who bestrode him. Paul Atcherley was as cool on the back of his uncertain steed as he would have been in an easy chair in his room, and he certainly never looked to greater advantage than he did in his black and scarlet jacket and cap.

He glanced up at the stand as he rode by, and touched the peak of his cap in military fashion as he passed the spot where Violet, Ruby, and Guy sat; then he broke into a canter, and reined up at the starting-post with the others.

There was a wait of a few moments, then the bell rang, and away went the horses helter-skelter, the black last, Atcherley holding him back with a firm hand, while Chesterfield's mauve jacket and cap was amongst the leading jockeys.

On they went—on, in mad, wild chase, over ditches, and gates, and hedges, and rails, some of the jumps so formidable it seemed difficult for any horse to clear them. The worst was near home—some rails topped with furze bushes, and a wide ditch beyond.

On came the jockeys, whipping and spurring, urging their horses to the utmost speed. Firefly was amongst the leaders now. On they came—on. Several rose to the leap and cleared it, others took it short, and fell with sickening crashes to the ground.

Then came the gray and the black, running neck and neck. The latter rose light as a bird, and with a clever kick-back cleared the lot; the mare rose simultaneously, but catching her heels in the bushes came down with a crash, throwing her rider clean over her head.

Miss Merton sank back with a moan of distress, but in a moment horse and rider were on foot, and Chesterfield sprang into the saddle, and was off again. But the race was lost to him, and lay between an officer of the Blues and Colonel Atcherley.

The roar of the former was going at a terrific pace, but Firefly was gaining on him, creeping up little by little. He was on his flanks, to his shoulder, racing neck and neck, and then with a clever twist of the reins Paul sent him forward, and he passed the winning-post a length before the roan.

"Paul has won!" exclaimed Tredennis, excitedly, turning to Violet. "I am glad. What is the matter?" he added, a moment later, for she was lying back in her seat, deathly pale.

"Nothing," she murmured, faintly. "The heat."

"Take this," he cried, drenching his handkerchief with eau-de-Cologne and putting it to her face. "Ruby, look after Vi; I am going to get her something," and he turned hurriedly away, not noticing, in the selfishness of his love, that Miss Merton was not much better than her cousin, and decidedly in a shaky state.

However, she recovered when she saw the mauve jacket coming towards her, and saw its wearer was none the worse for his tumble, while Violet flushed rosy when she saw a scarlet cap above the heads of the people, steering towards them, and seemed quite to have recovered from her indisposition when he stood beside her.

"You see," he said, in low tones, while his dark eyes sought hers angrily, "your good wishes have brought me luck. I have won!"

"Yes," she answered, with drooping lids.

"Are you not glad?" he questioned, a touch of impatience in his manner.

"Yes, very," she acknowledged. And then, feeling his glance on her, she lifted her eyes, and the blue met the impassioned look of the brown.

He wavered and fell before it, and again a burning flush mounted to the roots of her braids



"GUY, ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE YOU. CAPTAIN TREDENNIS—MISS HARcourt!" SAID CHESTERFIELD.

hair, and dyed even her throat with its crimson tinge.

"You wished me victory, and it has come to me," he went on, in a tone that vibrated with some hidden feeling. "I wonder, will it always be so? Will you always wish me to succeed in what I set my heart on?"

"I—always—wish—my—friends—well," she faltered.

"But—I would be something more than a friend!" he muttered, almost fiercely; adding aloud, "Did you back me?"

"Yes."

"What have you won?"

"Two or three bottles of perfume and some gloves."

"I owe you a dozen pairs," he went on, to let her recover herself.

"Why?"

"You backed the field against the favourite, didn't you?"

"Yes, I thought it safe betting."

"So it is, generally. Well, my horse was not the favourite, consequently I am in your debt for the gloves."

"I see."

"I must send to town for them. I could not get any fit for you in that miserable little place," nodding his handsome head toward Lissington.

"They won't come down before Friday. May I bring them to you then?"

"Yes," she replied, with some reluctance.

"You will be at home?"

"Yes, I—think so," with still more reluctance, for it seemed like making an appointment with this man, who exercised his powerful fascinations on her.

"Very well, then," with a gleam of triumph in his dark eyes. "I shall come and discharge my debt."

And then he stood aside, for Guy arrived with his brandy and soda, and pressed Violet to take it.

"No, I don't want it," she replied, pettishly, pushing it aside.

"You had better take it; it will do you good," he urged.

"No, thank you, I would rather not," she answered, coldly.

And something in her manner struck him as odd. And after looking at her fixedly, he sent the waiter away with it, and in silence acceded to her request to be taken home soon; for all the interest in the day's racing was over for her, and she felt so restless, miserable, cross, that she longed for the solitude of her own room, and to be out of range of those two pairs of eyes—the sad, grey ones, that looked at her with mute, wistful reproach in their soft depth, and those fiery brown ones, whose glance seemed to search her brain, to draw her heart out of her bosom by their magnetism.

CHAPTER VII.

A few days later, as Violet sat under the verandah of the morning-room, a shadow fell across the book on her knee, and looking up with a thrill, half-fear, half-pleasure, she saw Paul Atcherley standing before her.

"I have come to pay my debts," he said, pleasantly, dropping a parcel into her lap.

"Thanks, very much," she answered, striving to keep down the unwelcome blush that rose to cheek and brow.

"Won't you look at them?" he entreated, leaning against one of the columns of the verandah, and gazing at her with his dark, unfathomable eyes.

"Of course!" untying the packets with unsteady fingers. "I must examine them. Give my opinion on their merits."

"I hope you will like them."

"They are very pretty, and do credit to your taste," she smiled, with something of her old coquettish manner, as she looked at the delicate greys, and lavenders, creams and tans.

"Thanks! I feel flattered," and he laughed—that lazy, indolent laugh of his.

"Don't you mean to come out this splendid morning?" he asked, after a short silence.

"I am out," she answered evasively.

"You can hardly call sitting under this roof being out!"

"Can't I?" with an arch look at him.

"No. It would be very different down there," glancing at the willows by the river's edge.

"Would it?"

"Yes! Won't you try it, Miss Harcourt?"

"Not to-day," she replied, trying to avoid a tête-à-tête of any length with this man, whose dark eyes were beginning to bewilder her senses.

"I expect Guy here shortly!"

"Then I am afraid you will be disappointed," he returned, coolly.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because Colonel Stephens sent for him an hour ago, on some business that will detain him till this evening. He asked me to tell you this. Now, will you go?"

"Yes," she said, slowly and mechanically, stretching out her hand for the dainty lace sun-shade on the little table beside her. "I will go!"

And together they sauntered away over the smooth, daisy-pied sward, to the river brink, where the sun fell on the rippling water, glistening it with a hundred bright colours; and the birds sang, the butterflies swept by, and the gentle breeze stirred the green bravery of the trees, and all was fair, and sweet, and pleasant.

There they lingered until the gong rang out the summons to luncheon, and then Colonel Atcherley bid her adieu, refusing to return to the house, and left her to go back by herself.

That was the first of many mornings similarly spent. The Colonel became a constant visitor at the Reach, and Guy was blind to what was going on, and attributed the change in his fiancée to a slight indisposition, never guessing at the truth.

(Continued on page 472.)



NELLA IS AN AUDITOR OF THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN MR. MALLON AND JOE STEPHENS.

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CYRIL returned to the dining-room with such a grim expression of countenance that Lady Somerville looked at him in surprise.

"She wouldn't drink it!"

He shook his head.

"I didn't ask her. I tapped at the door and got no answer."

"I dare say she was asleep. She seemed quite exhausted. I shall go in presently and propose to take her to bed."

Vere made no answer, and she thought him strangely unsympathetic, especially when she went on to lament over Godfrey's headache, to which he only responded with a grunt.

"I shall never forget the fright I had this morning!" she said with a sigh. "Godfrey is so delicate, that I am always afraid some dreadful thing will happen to him."

"Creaking hinges last the longest."

"Yes; but those who are most prized"—her voice growing soft—"are sure to be taken from us!"

"Ah! but is he prized?" slightly elevating his eyebrows.

"More than I can tell you!" impressively. "Remember, we have no son, and he takes a son's place."

"I never understand him. He always goes about with a doleful, hang-dog expression, as if he hated everyone and himself as well."

"Dejected! Yes; but 'hang-dog' sounds so very unpleasant," she remonstrated, gently. "Poor fellow; he has been so bitterly tried that no wonder his high spirits were crushed. You can't expect him to be always laughing, when a man has suffered such terrible bereavements."

"About his sister, I never knew whether to sympathise or not," sinking his voice. "Do you think she really died?"

"My dear Mr. Vere, what are you thinking of?"

Of course she did. Why, where could she have been hidden all this while?"

"He might have hidden her, if he had an object. There are no end of quiet corners where such a thing might be carried out."

"I hope not," with a little shiver. "The idea is too ridiculous. What could have been his object?"

"Spite against Maltavers!"

"But he was his best friend—and, pardon me, it seems quite absurd to discuss it seriously. Is there any girl alive who would allow herself to be hidden away in a corner for the best years of her life?"

"Forces might be used, if persuasion failed," with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Yes, if poor Godfrey were a Bluebeard, instead of one of the most amiable men alive. Do you know, that when our poor Lina died we trembled for his reason!"

"I don't wonder," with a kindly smile. "I remember her years ago, at a haymaking party, looking as bright and happy as the day itself. It was hard for anyone to lose her."

"She was always bright, never a cloud on her face. I suppose you came over with the Arkwrights?"

"Yes, I was staying with them." Afraid of pursuing that subject any further in Mr. Mallon's presence he abruptly asked if Lady Somerville did not think the facial paralysis had disappeared most wonderfully!

"It was not facial paralysis exactly," interposed Mr. Mallon, eager not to make himself out a prodigy beyond belief. "It was more like—like—"

"Ah, I understand, I've felt it myself"—a remark which would have nearly destroyed Cyril's gravity, if he had been in a mood to see a joke. "Dr. Musgrave always tells me it is an aggravated attack of neuralgia, and that the only thing for it is plenty of support. I hope you have been taking champagne. And now I think it is time to see how our other patient is progressing," getting up from her chair, and drop-

ping her handkerchief; which Vere at once secured, as it would give him an excuse for following her at once, instead of waiting for the others.

He saw Lady Somerville and Meta go into the boudoir, then came in with the handkerchief in his hand.

"I think you dropped this!" he said, on purpose to make them aware of his presence as his quick eye went round the room in search of Somerville. Nella was lying on the sofa, her lashes wet with tears, her face flushed as if with recent agitation, and Cyril thought he understood it all so well as he stooped to pick up something he had trodden on. "Whose is this?" and he held it up.

Lady Somerville looked round, as Meta exclaimed.

"Godfrey's signet-ring! How on earth did it get here?"

"How very extraordinary!" said her mother. "I suppose he dropped it when we were all here before dinner. Nella, my love, you must have something before you go to bed."

"I think Somerville must have taken it off on purpose," said Vere, slowly. "His hand is scarcely so thin that it could tumble off by accident."

The pink deepened in Nella's cheeks.

"What does it matter!" and she raised herself on her elbow. Though he had wronged and insulted her, the infinite pity of a woman's gentle heart made her resolve to defend him, and not portion out her generosity in halves. "Whether pulled off, or dropped, he will certainly want it back again."

"Shall I tell him that you return it?" fixing his eyes on her sternly.

"Certainly not. Give it to Meta."

"Ah, perhaps it was to you he offered it?" turning to Miss Somerville as he spoke.

"Oh, no," she said, holding out her hand for it. "He values it so much that he would not give it to anyone."

"Not if he loved her to distraction!"

"No, he must be further gone than he ever could be," with a little sad smile, "to come to that!"

"That he ever could be!" with a glance at Nella, who instantly got up, feeling weak and dizzy.

"How did you hurt your neck?" asked Lady Somerville, as she kissed her affectionately.

"It was an accident."

"Somerville's words," thought Vere. "They got up the lesson between them. You never told us anything about your expedition," he said, aloud. "Where you met, or how you dared, or where this accident happened. It all seems wrapt in the profoundest mystery."

"Poor thing! how could she tell us?" exclaimed Meta. "She could not talk when she was fainting."

"No, but she could afterwards," remembering how he had seen her in an animated conversation with Somerville, clinging to his arm, and letting his eyes dwell with as he called it, "insolent admiration" on her face.

Nella leant against the table, feeling rather like a hunted animal with those three pairs of questioning eyes trying to drag her secret from her.

"I was delayed on the road," she said, slowly; "for a man whom I met, told me there was a gentleman lying ill at the 'Fox and Hounds,' who had been hurt by a fall, and so I went there to see, and found a dissenting minister"—with a slight smile at the contrast they presented to her mind—"instead of Mr. Somerville."

"And where did you find him?"

"After that," her lids dropping on her burning cheeks, for it was hard for her to deceive, "something startled Limerick, my reins broke, my whip was lost, and I never was so frightened in my life."

"Poor child! Meta, dear, take her upstairs. I think, perhaps, a cup of hot coffee would do her more good than anything else," seeing that her teeth actually chattered at the remembrance.

But Vere was inexorable.

"Where did you find Somerville?"

She looked over her shoulder as she went through the door.

"I was tearing along the road at a great pace, when I heard hoofs behind me, and he joined me just outside the gates."

"Then you don't know any more about him than we do?" pursued her across the hall.

"I don't know why Pearl came home alone," she said, wearily. "At least, I don't remember."

"Don't worry her about it now, Mr. Vere," said Meta, surprised at his persistency. "Godfrey will tell us everything to-morrow."

"Yes," he thought bitterly, as he followed his hostess into the drawing-room—"one big falsehood wrapt in a cover of truth to make it go down."

When Sir Edward and Mr. Mallon came in, Lady Somerville, who had found the conversation unusually difficult to keep alive, departed upstairs to see after her beloved nephew.

She found him lying on a sofa, pale and dishevelled, as if he had run his fingers through his hair on purpose to make it stand on end—with a lamp by his side, and an uncut novel in his hand.

She put her hand on his head, and gently smoothed his hair, inquiring most tenderly after his health.

He answered less abruptly than usual, feeling the value of her affection now that he knew it to be forfeited. In answer to her questions he told her that his head throbbed maddeningly—which was true—and that it was not to be wondered at after his spill in the morning—which certainly implied a falsehood. Pearl had thrown him somewhere not far from Newington; and when he recovered his senses he wandered "all over the place" looking for her, but the brute was nowhere to be seen. Utterly done for, he reached an inn, which he did not know at all—went to bed, and never woke till late in the afternoon. After that he borrowed a horse, and came upon Miss Maynard somewhere along the road, in a deplorable condition, as if Limerick had been down with her.

"You should have sent us word!"

"You can't expect a stunned man to act like one who has all his wits about him. I should like to have seen anyone writing letters after such a spill as I had."

"It was not your fault, of course, but we were so miserably frightened!" the tears coming into her eyes as she thought of Pearl with the empty saddle.

"Glad to hear it," with a smile. "I didn't know anyone cared enough about me to turn a hair."

"Godfrey!" in a pained voice, "when you know that, after our Meta, you are dearer to us than anyone else in the world."

"Only dear as long as you know nothing against me. If you found out that I had committed the smallest sin in the calendar you would instantly turn your most respectable backs on the sinner."

"I wish you would not talk like that," with a suspicion of a frown on her usually placid brow; "I can't bear to hear you. I know that you are far too honourable and high-principled ever to do anything really disgraceful; and small indiscretions we must all be ready to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven."

"My principles forsook me with my first teeth, and I haven't got one of them left. Not my fault, aunt, so don't shake your head. Place a man that can't swim to water, out of his depth, and he is sure to sink. That was my case."

"But you haven't sunk!" with a fond smile.

"At least I can sink no further," his gloomy eyes fixed on the fire. "I've reached the bottom at last."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"I WONDER what is the meaning of Somerville's turning up again!" said Vere, thoughtfully, as he tilted his chair back, resting his feet on the stone coping which surrounded the tessellated tiles of the smoking-room fire, and surveyed the ceiling. Do you think he found her?"

"No, the odds are against it. He was never a healthy-looking fellow, but he looked positively ghastly when he came in—just the sort of expression you could imagine on a poor devil who was going to jump from London Bridge."

"I wish he had done it."

"What's the matter, old man? You are not yourself to-night," and Victor looked at him anxiously.

"The matter!—anyone could see it with half an eye. It's a good thing we are off on Wednesday—'pon my word, I couldn't stand it much longer!"

"You've been awfully good to bear it!"

"Nonsense! I didn't mean that," interrupting him, hastily. "Nothing to do with you; but that brute makes me sick. I don't think I shall have any peace of mind till I've given him a thrashing."

"You couldn't do it under his uncle's roof; and when we are clear of it, I shall be inclined to dispute the privilege."

"What are the plans for to-morrow?"

"I've sent word to Joe Stephens to keep watch to-night—so long as Somerville is here, I consider that we are pretty safe. If possible I shall slip away early in the morning; but if Sir Edward books me, Danvers is to go in my place. Poor little Robin evidently gave them the slip yesterday"—stopping to refill his pipe—"and Pearl was sent home to throw us off our guard, whilst he was looking for her."

"If you think she isn't found, I had better call in Scotland yard, and put them on the track; but, turning it over every way, I don't think Somerville would have come back. He would have been missing as well as his sister."

"He might be afraid of exciting suspicion. Remember, he does not know that we suspect him."

"He awoke a rat last Thursday. He's sharp enough; but whatever could induce him to settle her down here, where everybody knew him I can't conceive."

"Although so near, it is out of the way, and it gave him the advantage of being able always to

have her under his eye, without exciting remark by long journeys into another county."

"We are talking as if it were proved," said Vere, with a short laugh; "when none of us have seen her."

"It is proved!" said Victor, doggedly—"not such proof as would hold good in a law-court, or justify us in applying for a search-warrant, but quite enough for people of common sense. Only think!" clutching his hand with the bitterness of unavailing regret, "if I had chance to ride towards Alverley instead of towards Silcote, I should have seen her as Miss Somerville did, and brought her home in my arms."

"Very likely you would have missed her. My cousin saw nothing of her."

"But Somerville evidently heard she was there, when he galloped up the road like a madman."

"Confound him! I wish his mare had kicked his brains out," said Vere, savagely.

"Has he been flirting again with Miss Maynard?" with a quiet smile.

"I expect they'll make a match of it," moodily; "and then he'll break her heart."

"If I were you I would prevent it."

"Easier said than done. Do you know where he was this evening, when we were safely out of the way at dinner?"

"In his room, taking care of his head."

"In the boudoir, taking care of my cousin."

"By Jove, you don't mean it! His eyes wide with dismay.

"I saw them with my own eyes, and then came away like a shot."

"I should have done nothing of the kind, but gone straight up to them, asking blandly after his headache. He must have looked foolish, and that would have been something."

"No good. When a girl's in love, she would swear the devil was a saint."

"I said nothing about abusing him. Of course, if you had tried that dodge, she would have been bound to stand up for him; but you might have gone in, and shown them your eyes were open."

"And been thought a spy, perhaps, for my pains."

"It doesn't do to be too thin-skinned," sententiously.

"It's easy to talk!"

"But decimal hard to do the right thing at the right moment. Let us come to bed!" and jumping up, Mr. Mallon lighted the two candles. "Look here, Vere, you've stood by me through thick and thin, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for you—you know that. Would you like me to give Miss Maynard a hint that Somerville's a scoundrel? She might think me impertinent, but she couldn't say I was jealous."

"Thanks, awfully. It won't do any good; but you might try."

And with this small amount of encouragement Mr. Mallon had to be satisfied.

The next morning, remembering that Cyril was going up to town by the 10.15 train, Nella took care to be down in better time than usual.

In this case, as in many others, virtue had to be content with being its own reward, for Vere in his bearing towards herself was like a porcupine with all his quills standing on end.

She might ask him for butter, with an engaging smile, or look quite concerned because Lady Somerville had given him too much cream in his coffee, but nothing softened him.

He regarded her with as stern an air as if he had been a policeman and she an incorrigible pickpocket; and although the conversation turned to the dance at the Arkwrights on Tuesday, he never tried to secure the first waltz, as had been his invariable habit when they went to a ball together.

As breakfast progressed her spirits waxed low, but her pride rose high, and in her eagerness to show that she did not care "the least bit in the world," she almost attempted a flirtation with Mr. Mallon.

Staunch friend as he was to Vere, he felt somewhat inclined to second her efforts, because he thought it was a pity that such good things as a winning smile and a coquettish glance should be thrown away; and, perhaps, if Somerville had been down a little earlier, he might not have resisted the temptation of annoying him.

As usual, however, Godfrey was late, and came in looking white and haggard, just as Cyril got up and begged to be excused; as he must be off.

"Give my love to the old lady!" cried Sir Edward, cheerily; "and tell her that she may leave her fortune if she likes. I know of a nice little place not far from here, with capital shooting, and just enough land to induce you to ruin yourself in amateur farming. Persuade her to part with a few of her guineas before it gets into the market."

"If she did, the dry rot would get into the house before I ever saw it," he said, slowly. "I don't think I mentioned it to you, that I was going to start for India next month."

Somerville shot an eager glance across the table at Nella; but she preserved a brave front; and only Mr. Mallon, who was sitting by her side, saw that her hands were clasped so tightly together, that her nails were white.

"Dear me! that is very sudden, isn't it?" she heard Sir Edward say; and then Meta said something, she scarcely knew what, and Cyril answered,—

"Yes; it was only settled last night; I've got the letter in my pocket."

Then she laughed—a little hysterically, and it sounded to herself as if the laugh belonged to someone else, and said, with her eyes fixed on a pat of creamy butter,—

"When you come back I suppose you will have married some girl out there, with a parchment skin!"

"Yes, when I come back," was the grave answer.

Then the door shut, and she felt as if the room were empty, because one man had gone out! As soon as she could move without exciting remark, she got up from the table, and walked out of the room, humming an air from *Carmen*.

In the hall she hesitated, remembering that the housemaids would probably be still in possession of the bedrooms. Hearing a step behind her, she hurried into the library with the speed of a frightened rabbit, knowing that this was the last room in the house where she was likely to be disturbed.

Sir Edward had his own private study, where he transacted any business that happened to turn up, either with regard to his large estate, or his duties as a magistrate; and the rest of the family were decidedly quite the reverse of "booky people." Meta sometimes read a popular novel, but Lady Somerville never studied anything but the *Morning Post* and the *Bible*. Therefore, Nella felt safe when she had shut the massive mahogany door behind her, and found herself alone, with the well-lined book-shelves and the quaintly-carved furniture.

She did not cry, but stood quite still on the hearthrug before the glowing fire, her hands clasped together, her tearless eyes fixed on the red coals. Next month he was going; by the month after he would be gone!

Whatever hole she got into by folly or generosity she would have to scramble out of as best she could; for her unfailing helper and friend would no longer be there to stretch out a strong right hand.

Only last night, if she had only known it, surely she might have won him over to stay a little longer, or give up the mad project altogether! His manner had been very strange to her; but that seemed always the case now, as if he were bitterly offended with her for obeying Meta's urgent prayer. He could scarcely have seemed more angry with her if he had peered through a chink in the shutters, and seen her alone with Godfrey Somerville in that hateful house.

It is always so in this world—the people you find pleasant as friends and companions, who brighten your life with occasional glimmers of cheering sunshine, fall away like leaves in autumn; whilst those who lower your spirits by the mere tone of their "How d'ye do," stick to you like a burr out of a thicket.

If he could only be content to stay in Ireland—surely the *Curragh* was far enough off from friends, or cousins! The pay might be better in India, but he had never thought that a sufficient

inducement for exile, when they discussed the future together amongst the cabbage-roses and hollyhocks in the prim little garden at Elstane; and now that he was going to marry one of the richest heiresses in Blankahira, money would be less necessary than it was before.

Her hand stole down to the chain which was hanging at her side—the tears came into her eyes.

How good he had always been to her—better than any brother; and she had often grieved him—often teased and plagued him, just to see how easily she could drive the colour out of his honest face, and make his blue eyes flash fire.

"When I die," she thought to herself, with that sudden longing for death which passes over the most worldly soul in times of trouble, "this shall be buried with me; and when he hears that I wished it to be so, he will know that I loved him in spite of everything. Oh, Heavens! if he would only believe it now!"

She dropped down on her knees, and buried her face on the crimson velvet covering of a sofa, tortured by jealousy of Dulce Arkwright, and yet feeling in the depths of her own inner consciousness that if it had not been for Godfrey Somerville she would never have had a rival in Cyril's heart. Pride would have kept her from all regret if she had not been able to treasure this secret conviction. It was like a nugget of gold, hidden away in a miser's cupboard—a source of joy to herself, but never to be disclosed to any eye but her own.

Time passed on, but she took no count of it till she was startled by the stable-clock striking twelve, and the window being opened behind her at the same instant as the door.

Afraid of moving lest Godfrey Somerville should be there, she kept quite still, though she wished herself safe in her own room; and utterly unconscious of her presence, Mr. Mallon, to her surprise, broke the silence.

"Well!"

A rough voice answered from just inside the window: "I watched 'em all night, so close that not so much as a wasp could ha' slipped through without my hanging on to 'em—"

"It isn't safe to stay here. Just tell me it as short as you can," said Mr. Mallon, hastily, "and I'll hear the rest outside. Is there anyone in the house?"

"Ay, they be there, sure enough. Leastways, I saw the old woman with my own eyes, and she talked of the other. There's to be a flitting at three o'clock on Wednesday morning. I made a note of the time."

"At three o'clock! Who was she talking to?"

"This young gent, here, with the taller-candle face, and the black eyes. They got their heads close together, and 'ad no idea I was specrin' at 'em through the hedge."

"Hush! someone is coming," interrupted Mr. Mallon, in a whisper. "Go to the stable-yard—ask for my groom—say you are a farrier—and I'll join you directly."

Joe Stevens nodded, touched his forehead, and disappeared.

"Three o'clock!" murmured Mr. Mallon, thoughtfully, as he softly closed the window behind his amateur detective. "At three o'clock my name shall be cleared, and Dulce won!"

CHAPTER XL.

LADY KINDERSLEY was an eccentric old lady of immense wealth, who periodically took a fancy to some young man of her acquaintance, offered to provide for his future, and promised to make him her heir.

As she was full of whims and caprices, the favourite was sure to be out of favour before two years had passed, and after having had his eyes dazzled by the prospect of unlimited riches, found himself not much better off than he was before.

But if the old lady had happened to die whilst he was still her adopted son, he would probably have succeeded to nearly the whole of her property; so discontent was left him as a legacy, and a tendency to covet what he had learnt to

consider his proper share of his neighbour's goods.

Cyril Vere had no idea of the danger he was risking when he gave a thundering knock at the door of No. 15, Chesterfield Gardens.

Lady Kindersley, a delicate old lady with a thin, aristocratic face, and fluffy white curly hair encircled her forehead beneath the folds of her tulle cap, rose from her armchair as Cyril was ushered into the drawing-room by a solemn butler, and extended a tiny, benighted hand in cordial welcome.

"I have to thank you, for taking the trouble to call on a solitary old woman. Pray sit down!" pointing to a high-backed chair, placed close to a roaring fire, "and tell me if there is anything I can do to forward your prospects in life. You are a soldier, I perceive," looking at his card. "A captain in the Royal Irish Fusiliers."

"For the present," with a slight smile. "Next month I exchange into the 3rd Bengal Light Infantry, and start for India."

"That must not be. Excuse me, but my curiosity does not arise from unworthy motives. What was the reason for your wishing to leave England?"

"There were a good many, which I needn't trouble you with," flinching a little under her scrutinising eyes. "The extra pay was naturally a consideration."

A smile flickered across the withered lips. Crossing her hands in her lap, the diamonds in her ring flashing through her black mittens, she said, quietly: "Do you remember that morning, many years ago, when you saved a boy from drowning on the Devonshire coast?"

"I remember pulling Godfrey Somerville out of the water. There was nothing in that. I would have done the same for a dog."

"There was this," with gentle persistency. "By your courage you saved me from a lifelong nightmare. If you had not been there, and acted with such presence of mind, I should have worried myself during all the succeeding years of my life over the hundred yards which intervened between me and the rock from which that boy slipped. You saved me from that uneasiness, and for that service I owe you a debt of gratitude."

"The service is not worth remembering. How bitterly cold it is!" trying to change the subject.

"Yes, it is a very severe winter, but we must be thankful that the snow has kept off. When I was a girl, I remember being cut off from all communication with the outer world for the space of six weeks. That would not be tolerated now."

"No, indeed. We go ahead so fast that anything might happen in the space of six weeks, and it would be a bore to come out, like a second R'p Van Winkle, and find the world completely changed."

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No. I am the sole representative of a quiet old country parson, and his Lady-Bountiful wife. They live at Elstane, Rutlandshire, and care for nothing much beyond the bounds of the parish."

"Except yourself," looking with admiring eyes at the soldierly figure and good-looking face just opposite to her.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm afraid I've been a great disappointment to my father. He wanted me to preach, and I wanted to fight. Saving my country from an imaginary foe was more in my line than trying to save a soul, and making a bungle of it."

"You haven't the face for a cassock," with a slight smile, as she remembered some passing fancy of her youth, before she married the late Sir Charles. "But that is no reason why you should be a soldier. Surely there is some other equally honourable career open to a young gentleman of your position!"

"My position, what is it? The Veres are of an old family, who transmitted their blue blood with an empty purse."

"You will not be able to fill it in the army."

"I know that well enough; but I have learnt to exist on little beyond my pay, and I am content."

"Do you make both ends meet?" with a sly twinkle in her eyes.

A slight pause. "Sometimes."

"What a pity it is! Here am I, an old woman tottering on the brink of the grave, with thousands lying useless at the bank, and you with hand and head ready to make use of them, and yet you can't, because you grudge me the pleasure of returning the service you rendered me."

"Indeed I don't," with a good-humoured smile. "The next time I am drowning I will let you save me with the greatest pleasure—if you can."

"Because you know I couldn't. Captain Vere, I have been studying your face ever since you have been in the room, and I can see that it is the face of an honest man!" she exclaimed, impulsively. "I have been cruelly used by those I trusted best. I have been obliged to discard them one after another, till I am left quite alone; and solitude oppresses me. By your own confession, you have no binding ties. Your choice of a profession has estranged your father and mother—"

"I did not say all that!" hastily.

"No? I thought you did; at least I infer that all their interests are centred in their parish, so that the presence of their son is not essential to their happiness. I have been making inquiries about you,"—with a little nod—"you must not be angry with me. Your chief friends are the Arkwrights, with whom my family have been friends for three generations, and I am told there is a chance of your being more closely connected."

"There is not a word of truth in it!" with a frown.

"Dear me! It seemed such a happy coincidence, and I was so pleased to hear that poor Miss Daldie had found some consolation for her past sorrows. She was very fond of Mr. Maltavers."

"She is as fond of him now as she was three years ago."

"But she could not preserve the same affection for a man who was accused of murder!"

"Why not, if he is innocent?" raising his eyebrows.

"But the dock—he actually stood in the dock," in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"Yes, and she would have given anything to stand by his side."

"Ah!" with a deep sigh; "there is but little maidenly modesty left."

"If you knew Miss Arkwright better, you would be obliged to confess that she was as near the angels as it is possible for human nature to be!" his face kindling with enthusiasm as he thought of her noble devotion.

"You could scarcely say more if you were in love with her. Come, Captain Vere, confess the truth, you are going to marry her!" and leaning forward, she laid her hand upon his arm.

He looked down on it with a smile, thinking what a tiny thing it was to wear such big diamonds; and then, raising his eyes, looked her straight in the face.

"The dearest wish I have is to see her married to Victor Maltavers!"

"Not after all that has happened!" shrinking back in dismay.

"Surely; the more unfortunate, the more beloved."

"But it would be such a dreadful thing for the Arkwrights."

"I don't see it. If I were Jack, I should be proud of it."

"But some people persist in thinking him guilty."

"Some people have a craze for sensation, and can't recover the disappointment of not hanging a baronet's son on the gallows."

"I know a very good man," with a solemn shake of her head, "who thought the evidence went against him."

"And I know a very wicked one, who would have liked to hang him with his own hands!"

"Dear, dear! how very shocking! For myself I can truly say that I always pitied him from the bottom of my heart; and if he had been lodged in Newgate, I fully intended to go and see him."

"A good thing he did not know it, or he might have been sorry to be let out," a smile curling the tips of his moustaches.

"Don't laugh at me!"

"Indeed, I wouldn't for the world!" in eager protest.

"But you did," shaking her forefinger at him. "You seem a warm partisan of this Mr. Maltavers."

"Yes. I did not know so much about him years ago, but now he is one of my best friends. I met him again in Ireland."

"Dear me, I hope he will not take it into his head to come over here. It would be most disastrous if he and Daldie met."

"She will never marry anyone else!"

"Then she must die an old maid, which, anyhow, is a much better fate than being pointed at as the wife of a possible murderer. Have you no matrimonial views yourself?"

"None," looking over her white cap at an exquisite face by Grenze, which reminded him somewhat in outline and expression of Nella—that tormenting, fascinating little cousin who was destined to be the plague of his life.

"By-and-by, perhaps, you will tell me. And now I want you to promise me something. Will you take pity on a lonely old woman, and, whenever you are in London, make this your home?"

"I'm awfully obliged to you for asking me, but when I'm in Bengal your pretty little house will be rather out of reach."

A cloud came over her face.

"I hate India! All my life it has been to me like one large cemetery, which has swallowed up my best friends, one by one. Is it quite settled?"

"I wrote the letter last night—and that reminds me"—putting his hand into his pocket, "I never posted it! What a memory I have!"

She rose from her seat, and stood before him, a quaint little figure in black satin and old point, with an expression of pathetic earnestness on her withered face.

"You have not the frankness to tell me, but I have not lived so long in the world without gaining some experience of my fellow-creatures. You are going to India; first, because you cannot afford to live on your pay in England, and you do not wish to be a burden on your parents; secondly, because you have suffered some slight disappointment in love, and you want to put the seas between yourself and the girl you like best in the world."

He bit his lip, and looked over her head once more at that picture by Grenze. Nella's eyes seemed to reproach him from the canvas.

"Is this wise?" she went on, softly, scarcely able to reach the point of his chin with her eyes, because he towered so far above her. "Directly I looked upon your face, I conceived a hope that I had found a son to be a comfort to my lonely old age. If you go to India, I shall be dead before you ever come back, and the money which might have kept you here, and given some pleasure to the last days of my life, can only be left to you as a legacy!"

Profoundly touched, he scarcely knew what to say.

"Indeed you are very good, but I couldn't touch it, I have no claim on you."

"You can't help having it, but you can throw it into the sea when you've got it. But as to the other affair, I suppose it is some small misunderstanding which has parted you; and then when the poor girl is sorry for having grieved you, you won't be there to know it, and she will break her heart."

"No chance of that," with a sudden frown. "She will marry someone else."

"Has she told you so?" still incredulous, because it seemed to her, old woman though she was, that with such a face as his, which seemed the index to a noble character, if he won a girl's heart once, he would know how to keep it.

"No, but I am not blind!"

"You are unlike most lovers if you are not," drolly. "The girl is Eleanor Maynard, I suppose, who was brought up in your own home, and now lives with the Somervilles!"

He flushed hotly; and no other answer was needed.

"A girl who is utterly alone in the world, with no one to take care of her but yourself," she went on, reflectively. "Of course, the man you say she is going to marry is a good, honourable, up-

right gentleman, or you could not have gone to India with a quiet mind."

"He is a scoundrel!" with suppressed vehemence.

"And yet you could leave this lonely girl in his hands. Captain Vere, I am surprised at you!"

"I could only do her harm by staying here," he muttered, under his moustaches.

"Harm? That could only be if she liked you best. Mark my words, you will never forgive yourself if you go away."

"She won't take my advice."

"Not now, but presently she will," in a tone of quiet conviction. "Have you ever advised her to marry you?"

"How could I?" opening his eyes in amazement.

"Ah! I understand it all," with a sly little nod. "At least you might have told her that you could not propose to her, and then she would have known where she stood."

"A poor compliment!" with a short laugh. "If I had gone further, and made a fool of myself, and she hadn't snubbed me, where should we have been then?"

"In a fool's Paradise, from which you would have woken in a real one," she said, quietly. "Throw that letter into the fire, and write another, saying you have changed your mind."

"I can't. You are very good to trouble your head about me, but it is too late."

"I tell you it is your duty—you have no choice."

"I have no choice, you're right; but it's just the other way."

"Have you thought what may be the end of the purest girl, when linked to a bad man? When the whiteness of the lily is once lost, it can never be brought back, and an infamous life lived under the sight of innocent eyes, robs those eyes of their innocence, as surely as rust eats into steel."

His face went white and stern, as he drew the letter from his pocket, and threw it into the flames.

To have saved Nella from such a fate he would have thrown up every hope in his profession.

Lady Kindersley stretched out her hand, the tears in her eyes. "I knew that I could not be mistaken. You have a noble heart."

(To be continued.)

FAIR AND FICKLE.

—:o:—

(Continued from page 468.)

"Vi," he said, one dull October morning, when the rain poured down unceasingly, and all looked dreary and autumnal.

"Yes," she answered listlessly.

"I have something to say to you!"

"Have you?" she responded, with a quick, almost frightened, glance at him.

"Yes!"

"What—is—it—about?"

"Myself. Rather uninteresting to you, I am afraid, dear."

"Oh, no," she said at once. "What is it?"

"The doctor says I must not spend this winter in England!"

"Why?"

"Do you feel ill?" she queried, anxiously.

"No. Only this wound," laying his hand on his chest, "troubles me somewhat. Now the summer is over, and he advises a sojourn in Mentone during the winter."

"Of course you must go, Guy," she said, without a moment's hesitation.

"I suppose so," he said, moodily, rather hurt that she did not seem to mind his going in the least.

"Your health must be your first consideration."

"If it were left to me it would be my last," he returned, irritably.

"It won't be left to you," she answered, gaily, a weight seemingly lifted off her heart at the prospect of his speedy departure. "And now tell me all your plans," and in telling them he forgot all his chagrin and annoyance for the time.

The night after he left England Paul Atcherley called at Harcourt Reach, and Mr. Harcourt being out, and Miss Merton having become Mrs. Chesterfield, Violet, of course, was alone.

"You are lonely now without Tredennis," observed the Colonel, after a few commonplaces.

"Yes," she agreed, but he was looking at her as she spoke, and wondered was it the fire-glow that made her cheeks so rosy.

"He won't be back until April, will he?"

"No," she said, faintly.

"And then—then you will marry him!"

"Yes," still more faintly.

"Lucky fellow!" he exclaimed, with savage energy. "What I would give to stand in his shoes!"

"Colonel Atcherley, you must not speak to me like that," she said, rising and facing him haughtily.

"No, I am aware I am a scoundrel to do it," he agreed, hoarsely.

"I cannot, must not, listen to anything of that kind."

"True, and I—must—go. Violet, must I leave you!"

He made a step towards her with outstretched hands.

"Yes; we—must—say—good-bye," she faltered, the bright bloom all faded from her sweet face, her eyes, full of shadow and sorrow, wistfully fixed on his.

"Why should we?" he queried, madly. "You love me, Violet, I know it," seizing her hands.

"No, no," she sobbed passionately, bending her head.

"You must not say that."

"It is the truth."

And there was a silence, broken only by the sobs of the girl, that fell drearily on the air, for terrible pangs of regret assailed her. Guy's life must be snared; she felt she knew that now, and it was a life that had already been stricken. She had lifted the clouds, and now she would banish the sunshine for ever.

Could she ever forget the torturing agony of those moments, when Paul Atcherley held her hands, and poured the story of his dishonourable love into her shrinking ears?

"Forgive me," he pleaded, as he listened to the piteous sobs that shook the slender form. "Do not send me away. Oh, darling! I am not worthy—not worthy of your love, but give it me, and you shall never regret it."

"I cannot," she moaned, trying to loose her hands from his close clasp that seemed to burn them.

"Don't banish me," he implored; "there will be nothing then to save me from ruin."

"Do not say that. You break my heart."

"And you? Do you think you do not hurt me. Can you not be pliful!"

"There is Guy," she murmured.

"He does not love you as I do," he urged, passionately.

"Go, I beg of you," she pleaded.

"I cannot. I cannot live my life apart from you," he answered, hoarsely.

"You must," she said, more firmly. "Our honour demands it. We can be nothing to each other."

"So be it," and he turned away, but as he turned she swayed and would have fallen save for his outstretched arm, and as he held her to him and kissed her lips and brow in a delirium of passion he knew she was won.

A week later Guy received a miserable, incoherent letter from Violet, in which she said she could never forgive herself for her treachery and want of faith to him, and which was signed Violet Atcherley!

"My own familiar friend!" he groaned, and throwing out his arms he buried his face on

them, and sat so through all the wretched leaden-footed hours of that dreary night.

At dawn he roused himself, and giving directions to his valet he set off for India. Five months of his leave were still unexpired, and he would go there while his agents arranged an exchange of regiments for him.

But he never reached India.

The people on board the vessel he went out in "saw death in his face," and no one was surprised when a ruptured blood vessel put an end to his life in a few hours. They buried him at sea. The cruel, treacherous sea, not more cruel than the faithless woman who had betrayed him, was his grave, and its blue waters washed above his head, and the waves and the winds sang a dirge for the gallant officer's untimely death.

[THE END.]

OPALS AND DIAMONDS.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DOUBLE WEDDING.

"WHAT an old-world aspect the place has," remarked Eunice, as they stood for a while in the quaint garden, bright with spring blooms, sweet with the perfume of clove, gilly-flowers, mignonette, and marjoram, listening to the babbling brook as it flowed merrily along.

"Yes, it is charming," assented Maggie. "I should like to live here, it seems so calm and retired. If it were not," she added with a shudder, "for that dreadful room and those barred windows. I think it was a pity to choose such a sweet spot—to—to—send—mad people to."

"That is exactly why it was chosen," responded Miss Molyneux, coolly. "Lunatics have a greater chance of recovering their reason if they are in a quiet spot, pleasant and agreeable to them, still with nothing to fret or worry them. And there is nothing here that could possibly be displeasing to a diseased mind; all is calm and peaceful."

"Yes, you are quite right. It would calm the most disturbed mind, I should think, living here."

"Tell me, Eunice," she added, quickly, "when—when—they go mad do they ever recover—ever become sane again?"

"Yes, sometimes. Some of them are perfectly sane for months together, and only seized with fits of frenzy, which last for some weeks. That is the worst type of the malady, for it is impossible to know when the frenzy will seize them. It may come on at any minute, and they may recover entirely; others will be very violent at first when attacked, and then they gradually quiet down, in many cases recovering perfectly after one attack, and remaining sane for the rest of their lives."

"Then—then—if Lionel gets—gets—ill—he may recover?" faltered his wife.

"Yes, of course. But—don't let us talk about it. Pray, Heaven, it may never happen. If the truth—the secret—never reaches his ears he will escape the doom of his family," and turning away she walked rapidly round to the back of the house, crossed a yard where the elderly cock, with his ancient hen, was strutting about, and entered a red-tiled, heavily beamed kitchen, which was empty, save for the old grey-muzzled dog, who slumbered peacefully before a glowing fire.

"Where is Granny?" demanded Eunice, stepping into the passage and addressing a little girl, who was there playing with her inseparable companion, the once blare-eyed kitten, now grown into a bleared-eyed and most unlovely looking cat.

"Upstairs, miss," responded the child, with a bob and a curtesy, and Miss Molyneux went up the time-blackened staircase, followed by Maggie.

Nance was in the gun-room, dusting the weapons and the curiosities, which it was her constant care to keep spick and span. She

turned as they entered the room, exclaiming sharply,

"Ye did no ring, men, did ye?"

"No," answered Eunice, promptly, "I came round the back way."

"Well, well, then ye ha'nt rest t' come in how ye wish, but I mun keep t' back wicket lockit as well as t' front, or s' whole wawl will be comin' speerin' about."

"What do you mean, Nance?" queried her young mistress quickly.

"Na, na, nathin', nathin'!" replied the old woman, wagging her ghastly head, with its adornment of flippin' cap-frill, backwards and forwards, with monotonous regularity.

"You must mean something. Have you disobeyed orders and let anyone go over the house?"

"Na, na. Who'ld want to speer about Molyneux's Rest?"

"I don't know exactly, but I understand that a gentleman has been here, and that you let him see the place."

"Wha' tell ye that?" demanded the crone, a look of fear and curiosity on her wrinkled, yellow face.

"Never mind who told me; I know it, and now I want to be informed how it was that you let any stranger in!"

"I didn't let him in," rejoined Nance, suddenly, "he let himself in," steppit over the thrashed stanes, and walkit straight in and up here, afore I knew aught o' his comin'."

"You should have turned him out at once."

"He wouldn't go. He just talkit and talkit till my head wharled roun', I didna ken wha' I was doin'!"

She did not add that the whiskey the gentleman brought and piled her with so liberally had done more than the talking towards making her head whirly.

"What did he do?"

"He lookit at the weapons, and the skins, and the peccuries, and—"

"Did he go into any room but this?" interrupted Eunice.

"Wast—he went t' s' best chamber, and lookit at t' paintin'."

"Into any of the others?"

The old woman spoke with some hesitation, as she answered, for her brain had been muddled by the strong spirit, and she hardly knew what her visitor had done, or what she had said; yet she dared not say so for fear of losing her easy berth as custodian of the Rest, so determined to prevaricate. "Na, be only wanted t' see t' peccuries and t' weapons, cos he said he were a paintin' laddie."

"An artist?"

"Yes."

"What was this artist like?" asked Maggie, tremulously. She had been sitting on the broad seat below the window-sill, staring at the hideous crocodile suspended in the air, and at the white-faced brodignagian owl.

"Well, men, he were a weel-favoured laddie. Tall, stran—"

"Was he dark or fair?" broke in her ladyship, hurriedly.

"Dark, me leddy. Blackit as nict," replied the dame coolly. She had a very hazy notion as to what complexioned sort of man the "paintin' laddie" had been, so said black, thinking it would do just as well as grey or brown.

"He could not have been him, then," said Maggie, with a sigh of relief, looking at Eunice.

"No," answered the other. "When was it the gentleman came, Nance?"

"At t' fall o' last year."

"I hope you will be more careful in future. You must keep all the doors bolted and barred. It will be hard on you and the child to keep out the sunshine, still it must be done. You can go out in the garden more often, locking the door, and taking the key with you. It would never do after all these years to let the fatal secret reach your master's ears."

"Na, na, mem, still fate will gang its gate" and the bonnie lad is fated t' cross t' thrassal o' Moly—"

"Stuff!" interrupted Eunice angrily, glancing at Maggie, whose face was white to the very lips. "Don't talk rubbish. Sir Lionel will be all right

If he knows nothing, and it rests chiefly with you to keep the secret. Be cautious and careful. Let no one in on any pretext whatever. I go away to-morrow, as you know, and my mother joins me in a month. We trust to you, therefore, to keep the secret faithfully, as you have done for many years past, and hope our trust will not be betrayed."

"Na, it will na be betrayt," replied Nance, earnestly, a flush on her time-worn wrinkled face. "I'm no aye t' clash, t' secret will be safe. I'll no gle my tongue lioance, and I'll keep t' wicket bolted an' barred gainst framfis' folk. I'll na be a taupie f' mather."

"That's right," said Miss Molyneux approvingly, "I shall go away now reassured."

"Be careful, Nance, for my sake," implored Maggie, tearfully. "You know I shall be all alone now, with no one here to help me to keep the secret but you."

"Yes, me bonnie leddy, I'll be carefu', Old Nance will help ye ony day when ye're in trouble. Come to her an' see."

"Thanks," replied her ladyship gratefully.

"Yes, I'll help ye, bonnie lassie," muttered the dame, as she watched them going down through the sweet quiet garden, "for ye are a sonde wee bit, but wha's t' use o' fetchin' 'gainst fate? Ye canna haud yer own, but must o'er gae l'."

"That old woman always puts me in mind of Susan O'Rannidid," said Eunice gaily, as they left the house, for she saw that her companion was nervous and depressed, and wished to rouse her.

"Who was she?"

"A lady jastly celebrated in some antique lines. Here they are, at least what I can remember of them:—

"Here lies the body of Susan O'Rannidid,
Who died of the fits, the same as her granny did;
She drank barrels of tea, and slept upon feathers,
Doted on Tabby, and 'turned out' in all weathers.
Was fussy and fickle, and sang through her nose,
Had a mission to look for the moths she could find,
Over beams of her own, in the eyes of mankind.
Had a fondness for doctors and such other folk,
As loves the 'dear people' because they will croak!
For—"

But, there, I don't remember any more of it," concluded Miss Molyneux, for she had gained her end, and saw that Maggie was laughing. "Don't you think it describes Nance?"

"How!"

"Well, she has 'fits' of a sort. Fits of wagging her head, and a very unpleasant sensation it gives me to see her making a pendulum of her cranium. Then she is always drinking tea—plain as a rule—still she prefers it with a dash of whisky in it; she dotes on her familiar, that ugly black cat, 'turns out in all weathers,' and resembles the immortalized Susan in many other respects."

"Perhaps she does. You know more about her than I do."

"You will improve your acquaintance with her now. You will have to go occasionally to the Dower House when Lionel is out of the way, to see that everything is going on smoothly."

"Yes, Eunice, do you think she is to be trusted?"

"I think so. She has been in our service over sixty years, and is devoted to us. She has only one fault."

"What is that?"

"Too great a liking for whisky."

"It is a bad fault."

"Yes, for, of course, when the wine is in the wit is out, and she becomes garrulous."

"That makes her rather a dangerous person to be custodian of the Raw, does it not?"

"Perhaps so. Still she seldom indulges, and when she does it is almost always late at night when the place is locked up, and her son at home to keep watch over her."

"It makes her untrustworthy, in my opinion."

"Allowing that it does, what can we do?" asked Miss Molyneux perplexedly. "If we get anyone else they must be told the secret, and probably they would be no more trustworthy than she is, and turning her away might incense her after such a long service, and make her betray us."

"True."

"Therefore, I think it better to leave well alone, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I believe she is devoted to us, and after speaking as I did, she will, at any rate for some time to come, be on her guard about strangers, and you can speak to her yourself again later on. I don't think, however, that you need worry yourself—she is trustworthy."

"I hope so," said Maggie, with a heavy sigh, as they reached the Hall, and went to their respective rooms to dress for dinner.

"Don't look so sad, Maggie; you have anything but a bridal expression, though you have a wedding gown on," said Eunice, gaily, the next day, when her sister-in-law was helping her to don her pretty grey travelling dress.

"I feel sad."

"You have no business to. You are getting rid of us all."

"Just what I don't want. I should like you all to stay here, always."

"A charming arrangement, my dear," laughed the bride, gaily, wishing to chase away the clouds that shadowed the other's face. "Still I think it would hardly answer. Just fancy you and I, mother, Maud and Clifford, Kate and Mr. Thornton, and last, though by no means least, the Comte and myself all living here together. Why it would be a perfect Noah's ark."

"A very nice sort of Noah's ark."

"In some respects, not in others. We might quarrel, you know. There would be too many mates and no captain."

"I don't see why we should quarrel."

"Neither do I, yet people invariably do who live in a heap like that. The only place where people don't quarrel and don't do anything nasty is Arcadia."

"Well, we would make the Hall Arcadian."

"We might, or we might make it an Inferno," replied the new-made Countess, thinking of Maud, whose cool eloquence and lately adopted airs and graces she could hardly brook.

"It could never be that, I am sure."

"Perhaps not, but it is as well that we can't try it, for I am sure the experiment would be an utter failure. We can pay each other lengthy visits every year or two. You must stay, when you bring mother, two or three months."

"Thanks, I should like to very much."

"And, of course, if you want me, write over and I will come at once. It is not much of a journey. I can run over at any time."

"Thanks," again replied Maggie. "I hardly think, though, you will care to run over very often. You will find that there are a good many miles between Mont Salda and Molyneux Hall, and when you have family ties and family troubles, you won't feel much inclined to cross the herring-pond once a week, or every ten days."

"What a little witsacre you have become! Perhaps you are right. I may not be able to come to England often, no matter how much I may wish to do so; and for mother it will be out of the question. The doctors say she must remain quite quiet, and that a return to England would inevitably kill her."

"Yes, still I hope we shall meet sometimes," said Maggie, wistfully.

"Of course we will," laughed Eunice, "and now do look brighter; it might be a funeral instead of a double-barrelled wedding you were attending, from your doleful face."

And, picking up her long grey gloves, the Comtesse went down to the great entrance hall, where all the guests were assembled, waiting to greet the departing brides and their grooms with satin slippers and rice, and to carry out other heathenish customs, invented solely to annoy and make uncomfortable the newly-married.

Mrs. Clinton was there before her, looking superbly handsome. There was a delicate flush on her usually pale cheek, a light in her blue eyes, an unvoiced animation about her manner, for the wedding had been grand enough to satisfy even her almost insatiable pride, and successful to the last degree.

The old grey church at Wimfield had been a perfect bower of snowy spring bloom, culled

from every garden and hedge-row for miles around; the village children had tossed orange blossoms and white flowers under her feet as she walked from the carriage to the church; Sir Lionel had given her away, while the ceremony was performed by her father and the Bishop of Salton, a very great man, and then in everything she had outshone Eunice. She had a dozen maids in delicate creamy gowns to support her round the altar. Eunice only half that number; her dress was richer, her looks more costly, her jewels more valuable, and she looked more beautiful; there were more of her friends, or, rather, of her husband's friends at the breakfast; and her bridecake was just double the size of the other; and last, and also, perhaps, least, in her eyes, her husband was a much finer and handsomer man than the Comte, who was somewhat swarthy, and who might with advantage have been a little taller.

Altogether she was thoroughly well satisfied, and looked it as she stood beside the debonair husband.

She had not married a title, it was true, yet she had outshone in many ways the woman who had, and her wedding had been a more brilliant affair than Maggie's, and many, she knew, would envy her her handsome, gallant spouse.

Though she did not love him in the actual, honest, true sense of the word, she was very proud of him, and quite willing to stand there in the great hall, the centre of a crowd of admiring friends, and be envied and admired.

Not so, however, the captain. He was tired of the bustle and noise, the endless congratulations, the empty, senseless speeches, the whirl, the racket, the incessant chitter and hum of voices.

He wanted to be off and away, to be alone with the woman he loved so well, whose cold heart he hoped to make respond to the cravings of his, and it was with intense delight that at last, some half-hour after the departure of the Comte and Comtesse de Villeille, he saw her making her adieus to the numerous friends and acquaintances who surrounded her.

"Lady Molyneux must be very much attached to her sister," remarked some of the bystanders, as Maggie clung weeping to Maud, much to the latter's dismay and horror, for she did not want her dress spoilt.

"Yes, yes, of course I will write to you very often," she said, soothingly, in answer to a tearful demand for many letters, "and if anything happens telegraph at once. I may not be able to come to you, but I can write and advise you, and we shall be coming to England for good in a few years. You will get on all right now. I never saw Li looking better, and you must learn to stand alone, to rely on your own strength for his sake and that of your child. There, goodbye."

And with a kiss that was quite warm for her she disengaged herself from the clinging arms, and went slowly down the steps to the carriage, apparently quite indifferent to the storm of rice, and only concerned about the graceful sweep of her trailing dress, but inwardly anathematizing those who threw it as a pack of idiotic fools.

"Maggie, don't cry so," whispered her husband, tenderly, after the carriage had disappeared from view, as he drew her into the quiet and solitude of the blue boudoir. "I shall think you care more for Maud than you do for me."

"Don't think that, Li," she said, fondly, nestling her blonde head against his broad shoulder. "You know I love you best in all the world, but I can't help feeling sad to day. I seem to be losing them all. Maud goes straight on to India after they have travelled through France, Germany, and Switzerland, Eunice will live at Mar-selles, and we shall see next to nothing of her. Your mother goes there in a month. Laura is buried in the wilds of Africa, and now I am going to lose Kate, too."

"How is that?" asked the Baronet, for in the bustle and hurry he had hardly had time to speak to his favourite sister-in-law, who, making up her mind at the last minute to leave her buxom twigs of six weeks' old, had only arrived late the night before.

"They are going to Manitoba."

"To Manitoba! Why?"

"Mr. Thornton has lost a great deal of money in some bank that has gone, and he can't keep up his place here, so intends to sell it, and go to a farm he has out there."

"Indeed ; and when do they go ?"

"Next month."

"Well, I am sorry for it, my darling. Still, you will have your father, and me, and little Jack, and that ought to content you."

"Yes, it ought and it does, my dear one," she answered, fondly, looking up in his handsome face. "I won't be sad any longer."

"That is right. It grieves me to see a single shadow on my darling's face."

That night at the wedding ball the gayest of the gay was Lady Molyneux. She danced and she laughed, and seemed to have thrown dull care to the four winds. Her lovely violet eyes sparkled, her cheeks were flushed with a wild rose bloom, she was more beautiful than ever, her husband thought, as he followed her with adoring eyes, and the dowager, as she glanced from the one to the other, and saw the perfect content on one face and the sparkling joy on the other, murmured—

"I can go now ; I can leave him safely. He is secure in the abiding love of his wife."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE "SWIFT" AND THE "HIRONDELLE."

A MONTH later the Hall was shut up, and the two Ladies Molyneux, accompanied by Sir Lionel, Little Jack, Peyton, Branshaw, and the nurse, set out for Marseilles. They travelled easily and slowly to avoid distressing the dowager, who could not bear much fatigue, and arrived at Mont Salut about the middle of June.

They were all delighted with Eunice's home, it was such a beautiful place. The house stood on the side of a well-wooded hill, thick with oaks and firs, and great crags of gray rock ; half-way down were gardens with vine-clad walls, and then the village, with its rose-covered cottages, and high-peaked bridges and quaint old church which had stood for centuries under the shade of the giant oaks ; and at the base of the hill lay the blue Mediterranean, dancing and sparkling in the summer sun, dotted with white-winged vessels, and here and there a dun-coloured fishing-boat, and its background of sky mirrored in its azure depths.

The interior of Mont Salut was quite in keeping with its surroundings. It was a sort of *bon-bonnière* on a large scale ; the panes were of delicate green, which contrasted pleasantly with the white house ; the entrance hall was paved with marble, and the noble staircase was of the same ; the floors of the principal rooms were inlaid, the ceilings were painted with scenes from heathen mythology, the walls were frescoed, and everywhere was there a bewildering mass of plush, satin, lace, fur rugs, velvet portières, valuable china, costly bronze and silver statuettes, rare pictures, beautiful enamels, and art treasures of all sorts.

Eunice seemed perfectly happy, and extremely fond of her husband, who was simply devoted to her. No thought of the madness of the past season disturbed her tranquillity ; she seemed to have forgotten the fair-faced, fascinating artist, who had bewitched her for a while, and so did Maggie.

She thrust aside all thought of him and the mischief he might do if he were so inclined, and enjoyed herself to the utmost. She felt safe there, in France. He, the man she dreaded so much, did not know where she was.

He could always find her at Molyneux, or in London, her husband was so well known ; but there—there she was safe, and she entered into every amusement and every occupation with a childish zest and eagerness that delighted Sir Lionel, for she lost all the languor that during the past year had possessed her.

Her cheek regained its soft bloom, her violet eyes shone brighter than ever ; each day she became lovelier, with a richer, fuller, mature beauty, and each day her husband grew to love her more and more, until it seemed as though his very existence depended on her.

It was a very happy life they led at the Mount, peaceful and healthful. They rose with the lark, and retired early, and nearly all day was spent in the open air ; it was so pure, and delightful, and invigorating.

After breakfast the Comte and the Baronet would take their rods, and go to fish in the broad river that swept its noble course along between the vine-clad hills, and then hurried on to join the blue waters of the Mediterranean ; and later in the day Eunice and Maggie would join them, sometimes bringing little Jack with them, for, unlike the general run of babies, he was no trouble whatever, but would sit contentedly where he was placed, tearing up the grass with his chubby hands, playing with the silver-frilled daisies, never uttering a sound or a cry, only staring at his elders with his great, grave blue eyes, as though meditating on the vaults of the world in general, and that of his immediate relatives in particular.

"I never saw such a queer little chap as he is," laughed his father, one sunny August day, when Master Jack had been regarding his parent, as he held his line and tried to catch the wary roach, with rather more than his usual solemnity. "He is sedate and calm enough for a quaker. I am certain when he does speak that he'll thee and thou us."

"I am sure he won't," cried Maggie, indignantly. "He doesn't differ from other children except that he is so much better. He never screams or cries, or makes himself objectionable."

"That carries out my theory, madam," said her husband, with a twinkle in his eyes that showed he meant to tease her. "Most infants do make themselves objectionable ; therefore he is different to the general run. Has anyone ever seen him smile, or give a genuine babylike chuckle ? I never have, and I've watched the little rascal for over a year."

"You can't have watched him very closely then, for he has the sweetest expression in the world."

"That may be ; I don't dispute that for an instant, but I maintain that it isn't a joyful expression, and that he never smiles. I appeal to you, Eugene ; have you ever seen my son and heir smile ?"

"Well, no," replied the Comte, slowly, "I can't say that I have since he has been here, and before that I had not the honour of knowing him very well. He is certainly serious for his age."

"There," exclaimed Sir Lionel, triumphantly. "Now, Eunice, what do you say about his mirthfulness ?"

"Well, if I must speak the truth," she answered, with a side glance at Maggie, "I must confess that I never saw a more sober or smileless infant !"

"Hear, hear !" cried the Baronet, loudly.

"What a shame it is to abuse my boy," said the mother, with a fresh accession of indignation. "He is such a darling."

"Abuse him," echoed her sister-in-law, "I could not do that. I agree with you in thinking him a darling, and he is the most beautiful child I have ever seen," and she paused and looked at the little fellow sitting there in his white frock, which left the dimpled arms and neck bare, with the sunrays pouring down on his uncovered head with its clustering rings of golden hair, and lingering in the azure eyes, with their jetty fringe of lashes, and lighting up the lovely cherubic face. "Still," she continued, "if he were mine, I would rather he was naughty and troublesome instead of so angelic. I always fancy that very good children with that sad sort of expression don't live long ; they go to Heaven, and become in reality what they look like here on earth, Heaven's angels."

"Don't, don't !" cried Maggie with a shudder, snatching the child up and pressing him to her breast, of which demonstration he took no notice, save to stroke her smooth cheek with his tiny hand, and regard her more earnestly than ever. "I couldn't bear to lose him now."

"Let's see if we can make him jovial," said his father, taking up a coral with costly gold bells and shaking it before him. But the grave eyes

never lightened, the rosy lips never relaxed. "Have a cake, old man !"

Jack took the cake, looked at it curiously for a moment, and then tossed it as far away as his tiny fist could throw it.

"Well, after that I give up trying to amuse or please his highness," said Sir Lionel, went back to his rod and his pipe, while Maggie tried by every means in her power to make her son give some infantile sign of delight or displeasure, but in vain ; he remained sweetly and agreeably indifferent to all her efforts, and kept his sad eyes fixed on the river that glistened and sparkled along, and on the sunshine that came in ripples of gold over the water.

"What can I do to make him like other babies ?" she asked at last of Eunice, despairingly.

"Well, I hardly know. Nothing seems to amuse him much."

"No, except the sea. He stretched out his arms when we were crossing, as though he wanted to catch the waves, and cooed in a faint, sweet sort of way."

"Did he ?"

"Yes."

"Then the best thing will be to take him on the sea again. Eugene's yacht is all ready for our reception, it lies in the harbour at Marseilles. I will ask him if we may go for a cruise in her !"

"That would be delightful !"

"You would like it ?"

"Oh, yes."

"Are you a good sailor ?"

"Very good, and so is baby."

"Yes, children generally are. Eugene," she continued, addressing her husband, "you were speaking of taking us on board the *Hirondelle*, for a few weeks. Is she ready ?"

"Quite, my love."

"Then we can go soon ?"

"As soon as you like. The weather is splendid for yachting just now."

"The day after to-morrow ?"

"Yes."

So it was settled, and after bidding adieu to the dowager, who declined to accompany them, they drove into Marseilles, and went aboard the trim, well-kept yacht, and favoured by wind and tide they sailed away at a great pace, straight out to sea.

At first Master Jack took little or no notice of his surroundings, but after a few days, when the wind shifted, and a stiff north-easter blew, lashing the waves into miniature mountains, and cresting them with creamy foam, he nearly jumped out of his nurse's arms in his endeavours to catch them, and cooed like the wood-pigeons do when they are calling to their mates.

Maggie was half-delighted and half-frightened. She was pleased at his taking notice of the warring elements, but afraid when the ship lurched and rolled, and the masts strained and groaned, and the wind whistled shrilly through the rigging, and she was far from sorry when the storm lulled and they were able to run down the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gib, and so round to the Channel Islands where they cruised about for a time, touching at St. Malo to purchase things, and then going on to Cherbourg, in which place the Comte expected to meet some friends.

He was not disappointed. There were several yachts there, and he soon spied the *Swift*, belonging to Lord Sittingdale, and was rowed over to her by some of his men. She was a long, elegant boat, with two masts, and a smart rig, built for speed, and manned by dapper tars in black and red jerseys.

The party on the *Hirondelle* watched the little boat as it danced gaily along, and Eunice took the glass to see if she could distinguish any one on deck. At first she saw no one, but as her husband came alongside, a tall form rose from a heap of rugs, and stepped forward to meet him, and then another man got up, whose figure was strangely familiar. Eagerly she scanned him, with quickened pulse and bated breath. He shook hands with the Comte, chatted for a while, and then turned in her direction. Yes, she was right in her conjecture,

It was Terence O'Hara. With redoubled eagerness she watched the group on the *Swift*, refusing to let Maggie have the glass for even a second. After a while Lord Sittingdale and her husband got into the dinghy, and then O'Hara followed, and the little craft was rowed rapidly towards them. Without pausing an instant she went up to her sister-in-law, who had seated herself in an easy-chair, with her baby asleep in her arms, his head with its tangled mass of golden curls lying against her breast, the rounded, softly-finished cheek shadowed by the jetty lashes, the dimple hands lightly clasped, a fair picture of childhood.

"Maggie," she said, abruptly, knowing there was no time to lose, "an old acquaintance of ours is coming with Lord Sittingdale. Don't be alarmed, and don't appear confused."

"Who is it?"

Lady Molyneux asked the question quite indifferently, never thinking of her enemy, whose image she had almost entirely banished from her mind during the past pleasant month.

"Mr. O'Hara."

"No!"

A sudden flush of horror passed over her face at Eunice's words; she turned deathly pale, and half rose from her seat, clutching the child convulsively to her.

"Yes; don't be agitated. Keep calm. It will be all right."

But it was impossible for Maggie to keep calm. She trembled and shivered, and longed to rush down to the cabin to hide herself from the man she dreaded and feared.

Escape, however, was out of the question; so, with a violent effort, she endeavoured to appear outwardly collected, and bent over little Jack to hide the quivering lips, while the Comte went forward with serene *aplomb* to greet her guests, and keep her whilom lover chatting for some minutes before she let him join Maggie, which she saw he was eager to do.

"Ah! Lady Molyneux, quite an unexpected pleasure seeing you. I had no idea when Sittingdale told me that he was going to meet friends at Cherbourg that you would be one of them," his eyes sought hers as he spoke with an eager light in them.

He remembered the last time he had seen her when she lay insensible in his arms, and he had pressed passionate kisses on her lips—kisses the memory of which yet thrilled him through and through.

"No," she murmured, not lifting her down-drooping lids.

"No," he echoed, triumph and exultation speaking in every tone of his voice. "So the pleasure is all the greater. I wondered where you were this summer. When I returned from Russia I quite expected to see you in town, and the disappointment was great, as you may imagine. I shall make up for the loss of your society now though, as the *Swift* and *Hirondelle* are going to cruise together for a while, so we shall see a great deal of each other, and that will be extremely pleasant, won't it?"

"Yes," she assented, hardly knowing what to say.

"And—and that," he continued, suddenly, his eyes lighting on the sleeping child, whom he had not noticed in his eagerness, "is that your child?"

"Yes," she said again, and then, without a word, he stooped and kissed the little fellow, a long, lingering kiss, such as men rarely bestow on infants, unless the mothers of the said infants are very dear to them.

Maggie felt she would have liked to push his face away from its close proximity to her own, and have brushed the caresses from her baby's cheek with the delicate morsel of lace and cambric she held in her hand, but she did not dare, so sat there pale as ashes, trembling with suppressed emotion.

"He is very like you," he continued after a while.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. Is he quite marvellous—most striking! He does not resemble Sir Lionel."

"No."

"What colour are his eyes? Violet—like yours!"

"No. Blue."

"Like mine," he said, lightly, and then with a rush came the thought that this beautiful boy lying in the arms of the woman he had loved so madly might have been his and hers but for an untoward fate which had parted them and given her and all her warm, young beauty into the possession of another; and a burning pulse of pain and pleasure stirred him, a mad, bitter jealousy of the man who had robbed him of all the joy that might have been his, and a passionate longing, a wild thirst to be more to the fair creature at his side.

Tender memories of old bygone days crowded thickly on him, mixed with the undying craving for revenge that never left him; and as he gazed at her exquisite face he hardly knew whether he hated or loved her, but he resolved to forego his revenge on the husband, and wreak it on the wife, for in so doing he was well aware that he would gain his revenge, and at the same time gratify the greatest hunger of all—the hunger of the heart—that craving which is so terrible when unsatiated, and that possessed him with a fever of unrest.

So, as the days wore on, and the white-winged yachts sailed side by side, sometimes with all the party on one, and sometimes on the other, the burning light in O'Hara's eyes deepened, and his voice took tenderer tones as he addressed Maggie. He was always at her side, ever ready to offer the little polite attentions gentlemen may to the wives of their friends and acquaintances, ever ready to praise Jack's infantile loveliness, or to breathe subtle flattery into her ear; and Maggie, relieved at the change in his manner, and too innocent to look below the surface and seek for the cause of it, or to notice that his eyes, once so cruel and threatening when they rested on her, now were soft and tender, gradually lost her fear of him, and ceased to try and avoid him, while Eunice, to whom his manner was perfect, declared that she thought they had been mistaken in thinking him such a terrible *morsel* sujet, and that it was anything but an unmixed evil his having been with Lord Sittingdale, as it showed them their mistake; and the Comte, who had been more than cordial, as he could afford to be, was quite delighted to be able to show the handsome artist that he wasn't in the least jealous of him or afraid of his superior personal attractions; and the Baronet voted him an awfully good sort of fellow, and struck up a great friendship with him, giving him a general invitation to come to Molyneux, which was just what O'Hara wanted, and declaring that he must paint Maggie's portrait, a commission which the artist at once accepted, knowing that it would be a labour of love to him.

Thus the days wore on, full of pleasure and delight, peaceful and calm, with that calm so sweet and serene that too often heralds in a storm which wrecks, and ravages, and destroys. The two vessels sailed back through the Straits, and reached Marseilles at the end of October, and then Lord Sittingdale and O'Hara accepted the Comte's pressing invitation to spend a few days at Mont Sain, and thither the whole party went. But it was soon broken up, for a week after their arrival Sir Lionel received a telegram saying that Mr. Randal was very ill, not expected to live, and that he kept constantly asking for Maggie, the only one of his children who was within reasonable distance, and could come to him.

So without any delay they set off, leaving Peyton and Benshaw to follow more leisurely with the luggage, and travelled as fast as they could to England, driving straight from Inchfield Station to the Parsonage when they arrived. "My father—how is he?" cried Maggie, as she sprang from the carriage and encountered Mrs. Truelove on the threshold.

"Very bad, Lady Molyneux," replied the good, motherly soul, with tears gathering in her eyes.

"Is he worse than when you telegraphed?"

"Yes; he is wandering now."

"Have you had the best advice for him?"

"Yes," she replied, naming two great London doctors; "Mr. Bainbridge is attending him as well."

"And what do they say?"

"That there is little hope."

"Oh, my poor father," and Maggie burst into uncontrollable fits of tears.

"Don't cry so, my love," said the Baronet gently, throwing his arm round her, and pressing her against his breast, "we will have more advice, and while there's life there's hope, you know."

"Yes, yes, I must go and see him."

"Not now, while you are so distressed. Come into the dining-room, and let Mrs. Truelove get you a cup of tea; then when you are calmer you shall go."

She yielded to her husband's solicitations, and allowed herself to be led into the shabby old parlour, which struck her with such a powerful sense of familiarity in this the hour of her grief and desolation. She sat on one of the antique rickety Chippendale chairs, and drank the tea that was brought to her with feverish haste, rising the moment she had swallowed it, declaring she was refreshed and more collected; and Sir Lionel, seeing her eagerness, led her gently up the stairs to the dingy oak-beamed room where the Rector lay.

The blinds were drawn up, the afternoon sun streamed in across the sick man's face, showing up, with ghastly distinctness, its sharpened outlines, the sunken eyes, that rolled and wandered restlessly, the careworn look that was on it, and the few grey locks that had grown long during his illness, and which were scattered over the pillows.

"Father, it is I, Maggie, don't you know me?" she asked, in a trembling voice, approaching the bed and taking one of the thin hands which were nervously plucking at the coverlet between her strong young ones.

"Father, don't you know me?" she repeated pleadingly.

But the old man did not heed the imploring voice; for the first time in his life he made no response to the pleadings of the creature who was dearest to him in the whole world. He was dying of an internal complaint, which caused him great agony; henbane had been administered to give relief, and it had affected his head. He wandered, muttering ceaselessly, and tossing from side to side, while his fingers kept up a restless plucking at the bed-clothing.

"What can we do?" she asked, tearfully.

"I fear not much, darling," answered the Baronet, who saw from the pinched look of the nose, and the blue shade on the dying man's face, that death was not far off.

"Will you send for another doctor?"

"Yes, I will telegraph for one immediately."

The hours passed slowly, till the clever London physician came. His verdict was 'hopeless' after a very slight examination; and pocketing a princely fee, he departed, saying that nothing more could be done than that which Mr. Bainbridge had already prescribed.

Maggie sank down on her knees by the bed after his departure, holding one of the nerveless hands in hers, that each moment were becoming quieter and quieter, covering it with tears and kisses, while Sir Lionel stood by in mute sorrow, to think that all his wealth could not relieve the physical sufferings of the one, or the mental torture of the other.

Silently they remained around the bed, and just as dawn was breaking a convulsive shudder ran through the Rector's frame; the blue eyes opened for a moment and looked upwards, as though seeking something. Maggie raised his head and pillow'd it on her breast; then he drew one long, deep, struggling breath; there was a slight rattle in his throat, the lids drooped over the weary eyes, and he lay back in his daughter's arms dead. His spirit had fled to the "Land o' the Leal," gone to eternal rest, leaving all cares and troubles behind on earth.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1885. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

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FACETILE.

CALLER: "Is the master of the house in?"
Proud Father: "Yes, he's asleep upstairs in his crib."

PAT: "Shure, an' there ain't no snakes in Oiland at all, at all." Bridget: "Right y're, Pat; but that ain't sayin' there ain't plenty av min there what sees 'em."

"THERE'S something uncanny about my Southport landlady. I think she must be a real lady." "What's the matter?" "She's not once told me that she has seen better days."

HE: "Be mine, darling. You are the lamp that alone can light my existence." She: "Yes, dear; but papa doesn't think you are a good match for me!"

SMIRKS: "I'll never regret the way I spent this evening; the hours have simply flown." Miss Sharp: "I am also happy to know that they have passed."

BACH: "Do you think a man who has his way to make ought to get married?" Diet: "Well, it depends on the wife he gets. Some women, you know, would object to his having his way."

MR. SINGLTON: "Miss Willing—er—Nellie—you don't mind if I drop the 'miss' and call you Nellie, do you?"—Miss Willing: "No, indeed! Only yesterday I remarked to mamma that I was getting awfully tired of being called 'miss'."

PENELOPE: "I hear your engagement with Jack is broken. Is that right?"—Patience: "Yes."—"Have you returned his ring yet?"—"No; I told him he would have to come round and pick it out; I really don't know which is his."

"FATHER," confessed the callow youth, "I have married her. We are two souls with but a single thought."—"Well, you've gained something. A single thought isn't so many, but it is one more than I ever knew you to have before," the honest dad replied.

JINKS: "I sometimes believe that if I were suddenly to drop through a hole in the earth nobody would care a halfpenny."—Blacks: "Oh, brace up! Don't take such a dismal view of things. It surely isn't so bad as you think. Don't you owe anybody any money?"

YOUNG MISTRESS: "I don't see why you should leave us so suddenly. I'm sure I've done all I could to help you with the housework, and I've done all the cooking." Servant: "Yes'm. That's what's the matter." "What?" "I can't bear yer cooking."

STRANGER: "You are the only gentleman in the room"—Guest: "In what way, sir?"—Stranger: "When I tripped in the dance, and went sprawling on the floor, tearing my fair partner's dress, you were the only one in the room who did not laugh."—Guest: "The lady is my wife, and I paid for the dress."

"I HAVE just learned," she said, with a perceptible tinge of asperity, "that I am the ninth girl to whom you have been engaged."—"Well," he merrily replied, "that ought to make you glad."—"Glad," she exclaimed; "I'd like to know why?"—"Don't you know," he answered, "that there's luck in odd numbers?"

MRS. WHEATEAR (looking up from her paper): "Here is a patent medicine which is guaranteed to cure you after everything else has failed." Farmer Wheatear: "What I want when I'm ill is a medicine that will cure me before I've tried everything else, an' not one that I have to put off takin' till I have waded through every other without getting relieved."

HENRY the voice of counsel for the defence thrilled with emotion. "Gentlemen of the jury," he cried, "you cannot believe the prisoner to be the cool, calculating villain the prosecution would make him out to be! Were he cool and calculating would he have murdered his wife as he is accused of doing? Would he not rather have spared her in order that she might be here at this trial to weep for him and influence your verdict with her tears?"

"My good woman," said the learned judge, "you must give an answer in the fewest possible words of which you are capable to the plain and simple question whether, when you were crossing the street with the baby in your arms, and the omnibus was coming down on the right side and the cab on the left, and the brougham was trying to pass the omnibus, you saw the plaintiff between the brougham and the cab, or whether and when you saw him at all, and whether or not near the brougham, cab, and omnibus, or either, or which of them respectively."

THE colonel of a certain regiment, who was very strict on his young officers, was continually inspecting their troop-rooms to see if everything was clean, and also to see if he could find fault with anything. One day he inspected the room of an officer who was noted for his wit. He had nearly finished his inspection when he noticed a cobweb in one of the corners, and thought to himself, "Now I have got him." "What does this mean?" asked the colonel. The young officer coolly replied, "We always keep one to ease a man out his finger."

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SOCIETY.

THE Queen of Greece is the only woman admiral in the world.

AT a Royal dinner the male guests never remain behind for wine and nuts. When the Queen rises and leaves the room, she is followed by everyone at the table, and the banquet is ended.

THE Duke of York is to be the guest of Lord Durham and Lady Anne Lambton at Lambton Castle, near Durham, from Monday, November 29th, until Saturday, the 28th, and there will be a large shooting party to meet him.

THE German Emperor's new stables are to cost about £400,000, and will accommodate 270 horses and 300 vehicles. There will also be lodgings for fifty married grooms and coachmen and their families, and eighty single ostlers and other servants. Two riding and racing courses, both under cover, will also be built.

THE Prince of Wales takes great interest in the churches around Sandringham. When he first acquired the estate there was only one church in decent repair; but, one after another, the others have been restored, the Prince having liberally contributed towards defraying the cost. He has spent more than £5,000 in this way.

IT is quite possible that Princess Stephanie, with her daughter, may pay a visit to the Queen. Her Majesty has always taken the deepest interest in the widow of the late Prince Rudolph, and the Archduchess Elizabeth is among the many young people with whom the Queen carries on a correspondence.

THE French ladies of Paris are now making paper-baskets, work-baskets, and bonbon-baskets of the ordinary wire basket used for drying the salad. One sees this basket in every French menage, and in many an English one. They are decorated by threading ribbons of different colours in and out the wires; then a ribbon is wound round the handle, fastened on one side by a large knot or rosette. The advantage of these baskets when finished is that they are made cheaply, they are light, they are strong, and they look bright and pretty.

QUEEN WILHELMINA OF HOLLAND has received a souvenir of her inauguration which is unique. The Committee of the Netherlands "Journalistekring" have spent months of patient labour collecting all that was written by foreign journalists present at the Inauguration festivities in September last, and the result is five large volumes bound in morocco leather, and filled with cuttings and illustrations from every journal and paper represented. The magnificent albums, ornamented on every page with original headings, borders, and appropriate devices, are as unlike the ordinary receptacles for newspaper cuttings as can possibly be imagined, and it is not surprising to hear that the young Queen has studied their pages with flattering interest.

THE Tsar of Russia commands an army of 2,532,436 men, who know no higher law than his will. He has a personal estate of over a million square miles of cultivated lands and forests, besides gold and other mines in Siberia. His wealth is literally incalculable, and probably inexhaustible. Public documents give no account of his income, as they do in other monarchical countries. Although the position of the Tsar may appear an enviable one, it has many disadvantages. The mortality among Tsars is probably higher than among match factory operatives. Peter III., grandson of Peter the Great, was murdered in 1762. Paul, son of Catherine II., was murdered in 1801. Alexander II. was assassinated by the nihilists in 1881. The late Tsar, Alexander III., died prematurely through the constant fear of assassination.

ROYAL personages almost invariably marry young. The Queen was not quite twenty-one when she married Prince Albert; the Prince of Wales was not twenty-two when he wedded Princess Alexandra; the late Tsar of Russia was only twenty-two when he married Princess Dagmar, sister of the Princess of Wales, who was twenty.

STATISTICS.

THERE are nearly 130,000,000 Musulmen under the British flag.

To be perfectly proportioned a man should weigh 28 lbs. for every foot of his height.

It is kept going, the wheels of a watch travel 8,558 miles in a year.

LONDON is 12 miles broad one way and 17 the other, and every year sees about 20 miles of new streets added to it.

GEMS.

THE development of the best within us is often due to our failures than to our successes.

THE real life you live sets its mark on you in the eyes of any man or woman worth knowing, and all your finery and education and charity can never cover that fatal seal.

THE race of mankind would perish did they cease to help each other. We cannot exist without mutual help. All therefore that need aid have a right to ask it from their fellowmen, and no one who has the power of granting it can refuse without guilt.

WHETHER our hopes are realised depends more on what we bring to them than on what they bring to us. "Do we know how to enjoy the coveted thing?" is a question seldom asked, but one which, if truly answered, will indicate to us faithfully the fate of many of our hopes.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FAIRY PUDDINGS.—Ingredients: Two ounces of castor sugar, two ounces of flour, two ounces of butter, two yolks of eggs, one white, one lemon-rind, half a pint of milk. Thickly grease some small dariole moulds or cups. Melt the butter in a saucepan, stir in the sugar and milk. Add this slowly and smoothly to the flour. Then add the beaten yolks and grated lemon-rind. Beat the white stiffly and stir it in lightly. Half-fill the cups with this mixture, and bake in a quick oven about twenty minutes, or till firm and a pale brown. Turn out gently and serve at once, or they sink down.

FLOATING ISLAND.—This is an American recipe for a custard, and is a variation made by using yolks and whites separately. Use one pint of milk, three eggs, three heaping tablespoonsful of the granulated sugar, one half a saltspoonful of salt, and one half a teaspoonful of vanilla. Cook it as you did the other custard, using only the yolks of the eggs. Scald the milk, beat the yolks, add the sugar and salt, and beat still more. Pour the hot milk slowly into the eggs, and when well mixed put it back into the double boiler. You must never stir your eggs into the hot milk, as there is danger that they will curdle from the sudden heating, and your custard will be spoiled. The danger is averted when the milk is slowly poured over the eggs and well stirred in, for the eggs are warmed by degrees, and do not begin to cook until put back over the fire. Begin adding the milk by spoonfuls until the eggs are warm and there is no danger of their curdling, then you may add the milk more rapidly. When the custard is cooked set it aside to cool, and then add the flavouring. When it is quite cold pour it into a large glass dish. In the meantime, while the custard is cooling, beat the whites of the eggs to a stiff froth, put them on a sieve and set the sieve over a kettle of boiling water to cook the eggs by the steam. Then pile the cooked whites on the top of the custard by large spoonfuls, and put a bit of bright-coloured jelly on each mass of the white.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. K.—Twenty-one.

BAGGIE.—We never reply by post.

PAVILION.—No similar arrangement in England.

DICK.—She ought to be married in her own name.

J. B.—They will share equally if she makes no will.

JOCEY.—Nothing better or cheaper than you can buy in shops.

JANET.—You must have a proper deed prepared by a solicitor.

MOTHER.—Your mother can only bequeath her own property.

ANCHE.—It would doubtless be legal but might lead to litigation.

G. W.—It would be a breach of the Enrollment Act, and punishable.

HOUSEWIFE.—Finger-glasses and doyleys are not correct for luncheon.

EMIGRANT.—Write to the office of the High Commission for Canada.

IGNORANT.—She is entitled to whatever is bought with her own money.

FRAUDSTER.—He cannot take your child, so continue to disregard his threats.

HENRY A.—If you have no written agreement you can be turned out without notice.

LAWYER.—You must employ a lawyer, as this is a matter beyond your handling.

A. C. H.—Windsor Castle has been used as a Royal residence for nearly 800 years.

NAME.—Apply to Paymaster-General at Bank, with every detail as to name, date of death, &c.

MONEY.—We think the best way to get rid of them is to keep a hedgehog in the place they infest.

ENTERPRISE.—We advise you to be very careful and have a competent person to look into the books.

MOTOR.—The law understands that you read and approved all that is in the policy before signing.

BOOBOO.—They are probably only monting. Put a little Paraffin's Chemical Fluid in their drinking water.

PARASITOID.—The matter is not one for our treatment in this column, but for a lawyer's advice and assistance.

PHOENIX.—You will have to pay the whole rent, particularly as payments fall due, should a sub-tenant not be found.

FOOL MOLLIE.—You had better wait patiently until he offers an explanation, which we doubt not will prove satisfactory.

DADDY.—The original shamrock of Ireland has long since extinct. The plant called the shamrock is the white clover.

FATHER OF ONE.—No parent is compelled to send his child to school, but he must provide education either at home or otherwise.

MOMA.—A letter of invitation, conditional or direct, requires an immediate answer, for silence does not always mean consent.

KETTLE.—Salvage is a reward or compensation made to those by whose means ships or goods have been saved from the effects of shipwreck.

ROYALIST.—The maiden name of the ex-Empress Eugenie was Miss Kirkpatrick. She was the daughter of a Scotchwoman of high birth.

ESQUETTE.—Apples and pears are peeled with a silver knife; pineapples and melons are eaten with a silver knife and fork, first cutting off the rind.

MADAME.—No matter how long husband and wife may be separated, there can be no second marriage entered into by either as long as both are known to be alive.

SYLVIA.—Since you can hesitate about their merits, take neither, for you have no love for either of them, and without that vital factor marriage will be an utter failure.

MIMA.—We would advise you to attempt the company to a lady. If you are sufficiently fortunate to meet with a kind-hearted lady, you will be very happy and comfortable.

OLD READER.—When did we answer you previously, and what did we answer about? It is quite impossible for us to remember what we are consulted about after the desired reply is given.

EVA.—This is often caused by the skin being too dry. Try rubbing in a little vaseline at night. Remember to smooth the brows carefully the right way after, or you may do more harm than good.

PHONE.—It may be dissolved in spirits of wine by putting both in a bottle, corking the bottle and setting it in a warm, but not too hot place, and shaking the bottle up well two or three times a day until the solution is complete.

REPORT.—1900 is not a leap year; 2000 will be; 2100, 2200, 2300 not; then 2400 is once more; only every fourth hundredth year has the extra day; this is to keep the years exact with the time taken by the earth to make the circuit of the sun.

FARM.—The Fleet Prison was named after the river Fleet, over which it was built, and which subsequently degenerated into the Fleet Ditch, and is now part of the drainage system of London.

L. H.—The way to write is first to have something to say, and then say it as well as you can. That is all there is about it. If what you say is something which the world wants to hear, an editor will find it out quickly when you send him the manuscript.

SUSY.—If the eyes ache, or are easily tired, rest them as much as possible. If you cannot sit down and do nothing, raise them often from your work. Bathe two or three times a day with lukewarm water, in which a little boracite and has been dissolved.

BERTHARD.—No, being a widow, you should not, at your approaching nuptials, wear white, orange blossoms or a veil. A delicate grey, however, would be appropriate. Or, as you leave immediately after the ceremony, why not be married in your travelling dress.

EMILY.—A lady may receive, and in strict honour, a ring from a gentleman, as she might any other present, but if any special meaning were attached to the gift, if it were intended to be understood that the ring was the pledge of mutual attachment, then she cannot otherwise but consider herself engaged.

FOSSEY.—If that is true, he was probably only amusing himself with you, and you ought to find it easy to console yourself for his loss. You could have no respect for a man who could behave in that way; and without respect no love worth calling by the name can exist. He does not seem worth regretting.

SHADOW.

It falls before, it follows behind,
Darkest still when the day is bright;
No light without the shadow we find,
And never shadow without the light.

From the shadow we cannot flee away;
It walks when we walk, it runs when we run;
We may turn our backs on it any day,
But it tells which way to look for the sun.

Ever mingle the light and shade,
That make this human world so dear;
Sorrow of joy is ever made,
And what were a hope without a fear?

A warning shadow o'er youth is cast,
Warning from pleasure's dazzling snare;
A shadow lengthening across the past,
Fixes our fondest memories there.

One shadow there is, so dark, so drear,
So broad we see not the brightness round it;
Yet 't is but the dark side of the sphere
Moving into the light unbounded.

CHARLIE.—Goldfish are not difficult to keep, but they require attention, and if properly attended to will live ten or twelve years. In the first place use nice, clean globes, and once a week clean each globe out well by transferring your fish with a net to another receptacle, and then washing the globe with tepid water. Use no soap, however, and be careful to keep any from getting into the water or glass afterwards.

P. D. B.—The best thing you can do is to stay in your present situation till something better offers. Keep your eye on the "wants" in the daily papers, and when you see a place advertised which you think will suit you, make early application, for there are generally a large number of applicants for almost any situation in a great city like this, and, of course, those applying first have the best chance.

ETHEL.—Hot starch is best for curtains; and it needs to be made rather thin. Mix the dry starch with enough cold water to moisten it; pour boiling water on, stirring briskly all the time, till the starch turns clear and transparent-looking; then add an equal quantity of hot water to it, and it will probably be about the right consistency, though people's ideas as to how stiff curtains should be differ so much that it is difficult to give any hard and fast rule.

W. W.—The length of a mile is not the same in every country. The Scotch and Irish miles are formerly about one and three-fourths English, but are now the same as English. A Spanish and Polish mile is about three and one-half English. A Swedish, Danish and Hungarian mile is from five to six English miles. A Russian mile or verst is about three-fourths of an English mile, and the French toise is about six feet. The Dutch mile is 8,101 yards; Roman, 1,028 yards; Arabian, 2,148 yards; and the Persian parasang 6,066 yards.

E. W.—The length of a mile is not the same in every country. The Scotch and Irish miles are formerly about one and three-fourths English, but are now the same as English. A Spanish and Polish mile is about three and one-half English. A Swedish, Danish and Hungarian mile is from five to six English miles. A Russian mile or verst is about three-fourths of an English mile, and the French toise is about six feet. The Dutch mile is 8,101 yards; Roman, 1,028 yards; Arabian, 2,148 yards; and the Persian parasang 6,066 yards.

CONSTANT READER.—Spread each piece to be cleaned over a table, and carefully break it by rubbing the crumb of stale white bread well into every atom of the fabric. When the crumb gets too soiled, throw it away. When one curtain or piece is done, go all over it again with clean, stale breadcrumb, and this generally is not too soiled to do the first cleansing of the next piece; but, with regard to that, you must use your own discretion, only noting that each piece must have a second cleansing with bread crumb. To help in rubbing you may use a piece of clean flannel. For delicate colours a little chalk for yellowish or fawn-coloured tint, may be mixed with the breadcrumb; and for light blue or green, a little finely-powdered starch, slightly tinted with blue, may be employed.

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